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What's going right

It is only a few months since gloomy economic commentators were confidently predicting that the world was about to plunge into a dark era of protectionism. Yet the global economy begins this year in its healthiest state ever, growing faster than any time since 2011. There has been a change in political rhetoric, but not in the willingness of people around the world to trade with each other. According to the OECD's most-recent projection, made in November, world trade grew at 4.8 per cent last year. Something seems to be going badly right.

Negative sentiments about the world economy echo those which have hung over Britain's economy ever since the Brexit referendum. A month before that event, it should never be forgotten, a Treasury paper signed by George Osborne forecast that 'a vote to leave would cause an immediate and profound economic shock', causing a recession with half a million more on the dole. Instead, employment has risen by almost 400,000 — and a lack of workers has become one of the UK economy's biggest problems. Britain's biggest jobs website says vacancies are up 20 per cent year-on-year, while unemployment sits at a 40-year low. These are the conditions for pay rises to accelerate.

People tend to think the worst. As a species, we have evolved to focus on what is wrong. We are forever telling ourselves that something dreadful is about to happen, whether it be economic Armageddon or climate catastrophe. As the foreign secretary points out on page 20, mankind has never been richer, healthier or less inclined to fight wars. If you could choose any time to be born, not knowing your social position or even nationality, you would choose now.

It is a wonder that the endless talking-down of Britain's prospects has not done more harm. As the chief economist of the Bank of England pointed out, the economics profession has had its 'Michael Fish moment', referring to the weatherman's dismissal of the 1987 storm and the damage that did to the credibility of meteorology. Like the weather, the economy is the result of millions of forces, often unpredictable.

The global economy does suffer severe reversals at times, but its general direction is upwards because human societies have a natural affinity for economic growth. Almost

It is with countries such as China and India that the best opportunities to do business exist

everyone wants to better themselves, and the vast majority are prepared to work to achieve that outcome. Government works best when it provides low taxes, regulatory restraint and sound money. That is a recipe for a sustained upwards trend in wealth over the medium to long term, whatever hiccups might occur in the short term through banking crisis, inflationary shock and so on. It has worked everywhere that it has been tried.

As the Office for Budget Responsibility is fond of reminding us, Britain is statistically overdue a recession — and traditionally, economists are usually blindsided by downturns when they actually strike. We have plenty of problems, chief among them low wages, the result of low productivity. But wage inequality, we learned this week, is at a low not seen for about 30 years: since the 2010 general election, the incomes of the poorest have been rising fastest. The fruits

of the recovery are so far being distributed where they are needed most.

This point would be a powerful antidote to Corbynism if the Conservatives could work out how to get the message across. Global capitalism has created a golden era of poverty reduction: never have so many been lifted so fast out of illness, ignorance, squalor, poverty or misery. Fast growth in the developing world means that global trade is increasing at a healthy rate, which ought to provide a pointer for the post-Brexit UK economy. It is with countries such as China and India (whose economies both grew at 7 per cent last year) that the best opportunities to do business exist. Once freed from the parochial, protectionist instincts of the EU, Britain should be in an excellent position to take advantage.

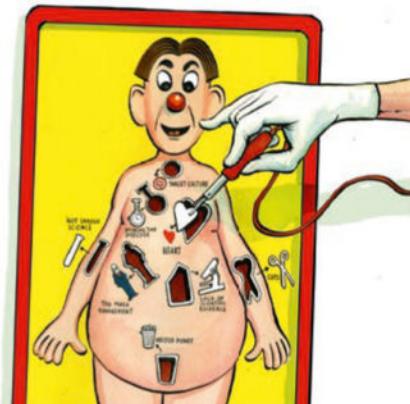
The UK economy recovered from the 2008 crash far faster than others in Europe, and it's encouraging to see that these are now catching up. The member states of the EU will be Britain's biggest single trading partner for some time, and they are now starting to address chronic unemployment and sclerotic growth rates that have held them back for so long.

The significant tax cuts just passed in the United States, our largest single trading partner, will accelerate this new chapter of global growth: a potential reflected in recent stockmarket highs.

Brexit, on its own, will not change a thing. It won't by itself make anything better or worse. But it will hand new powers to ministers — who can use them well or badly or not at all. If Britain does not prosper over the next few years, it will not be because of a lack of opportunity.



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Easily the worst Churchill movie ever made was *Churchill* (2017). I counted 120 historical inaccuracies in those two hours of my life I'll never get back **Andrew Roberts, p44**

CONTRIBUTORS

Boris Johnson is a former editor of this magazine, now the Foreign Secretary. On p20, he argues that we have never had it so good.

James Grogono is a retired general surgeon. He delves into private surgery and doctors' dilemmas on p24.

Emily Hill is a journalist and the author of *Bad Romance*, a collection of her short stories. On p38 she writes about jealousy, revenge and heartbreak.

Nicholas Shakespeare, who writes about the founding of Australia on p32, is a novelist, biographer and broadcaster. He won the Somerset Maugham Award for *The Vision of Elena Silves*.

Kate Womersley, who read English then history at Cambridge and Harvard, is now back at Cambridge training to be doctor. On p40, she explores the grisly world of Victorian medicine.

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PORTRAIT OF THE WEEK



Home

Theresa May, the Prime Minister, tried to shuffle her cabinet, but Jeremy Hunt, the Health Secretary, refused to become Business Secretary and stayed put with the words 'Social Care' added to his title. Sajid Javid, the Communities Secretary, had 'Housing' tacked on to his. Justine Greening spent three hours with Mrs May and emerged without her job as Education Secretary, having turned down Work and Pensions, which went to Esther McVey. David Lidington was made Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, taking over tasks that had been performed by Damian Green, and was replaced as the sixth Justice Secretary in six years by David Gauke, the first solicitor to be made Lord Chancellor. Education went to Damian Hinds, who was replaced as Employment Minister by Alok Sharma, who was replaced as Housing Minister by Dominic Raab, who was replaced as Justice Minister by Rory Stewart, who was replaced as Africa Minister by Harriett Baldwin. James Brokenshire resigned as Northern Ireland Secretary on genuine health grounds, to be replaced by Karen Bradley, whose secretaryship at Digital, Culture, Media and Sport went to Matt Hancock. The shuffle brought above 50 per cent the proportion of Oxbridge-educated Cabinet ministers. Mrs May said the Government now looked 'more like the country it serves'.

The Conservative party's official Twitter account congratulated Chris Grayling on his appointment as party chairman, only for Brandon Lewis to be appointed,

in succession to Sir Patrick McLoughlin. James Cleverly became his deputy and nine vice-chairmen were appointed, including Kemi Badenoch, given responsibility for appointing candidates, and Maria Caulfield, who opposes legalising abortion for non-medical reasons beyond 24 weeks, given responsibility for women.

Carrie Gracie resigned as BBC China editor, reverting to newsroom duties and rejecting an offer of a £45,000 rise to her £135,000 salary, in the face of what she called 'unlawful pay discrimination'. Peter Preston, editor of the *Guardian* from 1975 to 1995, died aged 79. Toby Young resigned from his new appointment at the Board of the Office for Students after a Twitter storm resurrected old bad-taste jokes that he had made. Meghan Markle, the fiancée of Prince Harry, closed her Instagram, Facebook and Twitter accounts. An updated Ministerial Code published by the Cabinet Office said: 'Harassing, bullying or other inappropriate or discriminating behaviour wherever it takes place is not consistent with the Ministerial Code and will not be tolerated.' Virgin Trains stopped selling the *Daily Mail* on its West Coast route due to 'concern raised by colleagues' about the *Mail's* view on 'issues such as immigration, LGBT rights and unemployment', an executive said. A series of recruitment advertisements asked questions such as 'Can I be gay in the Army?'

Abroad

President Donald Trump of the United States was regarded by White House

staff as being like a 'child', because he needed 'immediate gratification', said a book called *Fire and Fury* by the journalist Michael Wolff. The book said that Mr Trump liked to be in bed by 6.30 p.m., watching his three televisions, eating a cheeseburger and making telephone calls. It quoted his ex-strategist Steve Bannon as describing a meeting between a Russian lawyer and Trump election campaign officials, including Mr Trump's son Donald Jr, as 'treasonous'. Mr Trump responded by saying Mr Bannon had 'lost his mind'. Mr Bannon felt obliged to step down from Breitbart News. The book also questioned the 'mental fitness' of Mr Trump, who replied on Twitter: 'Throughout my life, my two greatest assets have been mental stability and being, like, really smart.'

President Emmanuel Macron of France made a speech in China that included the sentence 'Make our planet great again' in Mandarin. North Korea, having agreed to hold talks with the South over border tensions, is to send a delegation to the 2018 Winter Olympic Games place in South Korea in February. In the Swiss resort of Zermatt, more than 13,000 tourists were trapped by snow, but skiing was impossible because of the risk of avalanches.

The Supreme Court of India reversed its order that the national anthem had to be played in every cinema before a film was screened. Hundreds of flying foxes died in Sydney as temperatures reached 47C (117F), the highest since 1939. A prisoner in Asturias prison in Spain was certified dead but woke up in a mortuary in Oviedo. CSH



Origin...

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DIARY

David Frum

Like every journalist in Washington, I'm enthralled by the new Michael Wolff book, *Fire and Fury*, which depicts Donald Trump as a president in steep mental decline, derided and despised by his entire entourage, family included. I read with perhaps special attention because I have a book of my own about the Trump phenomenon being released on 16 January, just over a week after Wolff's. The experience is a little like being the next presenter at the Golden Globes immediately after Oprah Winfrey's speech. Wolff is interested in personalities, not politics. But while Trump may be stupid or crazy, the people enabling him are neither of those things. The lucky-bounce election of Trump by a freak of the Electoral College offered US Republicans an unexpected opportunity to enact a deeply unpopular agenda. In return, Trump has demanded that they protect him — and attack his enemies. On the very day before the 'very stable genius' tweets, Republicans on the Senate Judiciary Committee ordered the Department of Justice to open a criminal investigation of Christopher Steele, compiler of the famous dossier of Trump's activities in Russia. They didn't consult or even inform committee Democrats, a sharp breach of Senate practice. Trump wanted it, so they did it. What the world needs to understand is not Trump's complex hairdo, but his self-serving system of power. That's my story anyway.

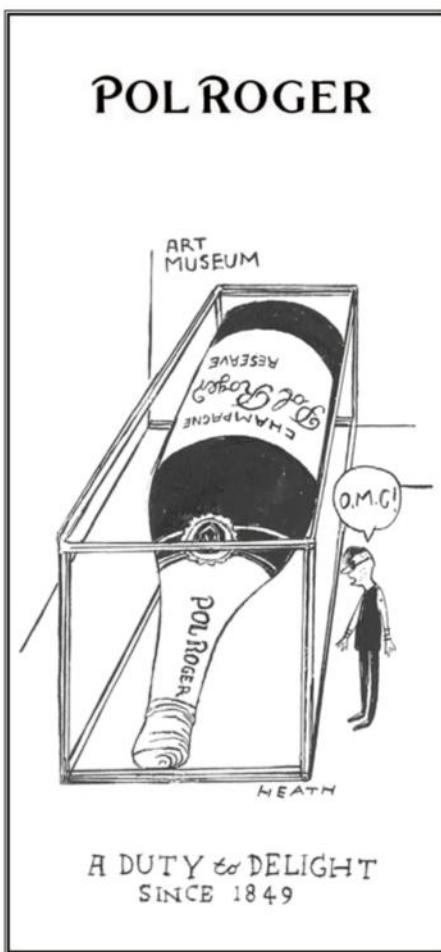
But while we're talking about personalities, here's an aspect of Donald Trump's that I've never got past: his hatred of dogs. When Trump tweeted on 5 January that his former aide Steve Bannon had been 'dumped like a dog', he recycled an insult he has hurled more than a dozen times since declaring for president, according to the indispensable TrumpTwitterArchive.com. After the 2016 election, a wealthy Trump supporter offered the new First Family a gift of an especially adorable Goldendoodle. On a visit to Mar-a-Lago, the supporter showed a photo of the dog to Trump.



The President-elect asked her to show the photo to his then ten-year-old son, Barron. 'Barron will fall in love with him,' Trump said. 'Barron will want him.' That's just what happened. As the supporter told the *Washington Post*: 'This big smile came over [Barron's face], it just brought tears to his eyes.' Trump never did permit his son to accept the promised dog. That's something, say, US allies might want to keep in

mind before relying on any of Trump's commitments to them.

The Trump presidency has been a disorienting moment in American political life. Imagine a time traveller starting in the year 1990. He steps forward 25 years to 2015. Who are the leading candidates for president? Bush and Clinton — again! What are the top issues? Iraq and healthcare — again! Now step backwards 25 years from 1965. The most powerful men in Washington are the head of the AFL-CIO, a federation of 55 unions across the US, and J. Edgar Hoover. There's a draft and a telephone monopoly and urban riots and liberal Republicans. It's a different world. I sometimes feel that what Trump has done is restore motion to a political system that froze in place when the baby-boomers reached middle age. What's coming next? Something radically different. The baby-boomers will keep ageing, and their dependence on government will grow. Trump discovered and confirmed that ethnocultural resentment mobilises conservative voters better than economic issues ever did. The Republicans seem to be heading for heavy losses in this year's elections — making Trump even more important as a single remaining focal point for party identity and party loyalty. Voters who cannot stomach Trump, especially college-educated women, are quitting the GOP. What will be left is a party that no longer commands a national voting majority. Only one Republican has done that since 1988 — George W. Bush in 2004 — and then only barely. But what Republicans are also discovering is that with sufficiently ruthless methods, a national voting majority may not be needed to wield national power. That's part of the meaning of Trumpocracy, and it's more disturbing than Trump's fast-food diet.



David Frum is a senior editor at The Atlantic and author of *Trumpocracy: The Corruption of the American Republic* (Harper Collins).

May's three great weaknesses

They are not as strong as they thought they were,' one Whitehall source remarked to me on Monday night as he contemplated the fallout from Theresa May's attempt to reshuffle the cabinet. No. 10 had come to believe that a successful Budget and 'sufficient progress' in the Brexit talks meant that much of May's political authority had been restored. This emboldened them to think that she could now pull off a proper reshuffle, something Gavin Williamson had regularly cautioned against when he was chief whip.

But a reshuffle that was meant to confirm the Prime Minister's return to political health has ended up highlighting her three biggest weaknesses. The first thing it showed was that she has not regained her political authority. Moving ministers around is always tricky unless it is done as a prime minister's first act or after a landslide election victory. But May faced remarkable levels of resistance, despite choosing to leave all the holders of great offices of state in place. In the end, the Health Secretary stayed put, even though May's initial plan had been to move him, and the Education Secretary resigned rather than become Welfare Secretary.

The result is that every Secretary of State who would like to defy May on some issue will now feel more confident. The Prime Minister is, clearly, not an irresistible force.

The reshuffle has also raised questions about the competence of May's operation. For the party's official Twitter account to start the reshuffle by inaccurately tweeting that Chris Grayling was party chairman was a spectacular fail. But almost as bad was No. 10 failing to establish whether Jeremy Hunt was prepared to move before he came in to see Mrs May. One ally of the Health Secretary tells me he had no contact from Downing Street all last weekend. This is particularly odd, as Hunt was being offered a promotion.

May's team need to accept that this is the second set-piece event that has gone wrong for them in recent months, the first being the party conference where the announcements were underwhelming even before the disaster of the Prime Minister's speech. Even those who defend the competence of May's team admit that the operation is understaffed. What is needed is an injection of those with previous government — and preferably Downing Street — experience. Given the momentous challenges of the

times — Brexit, the need to defeat the most left-wing Labour leader in generations and persistently sluggish earnings growth — May might find people more receptive to the call to serve than she'd expect.

To be fair, the reshuffle did attempt some progress on this front. Oliver Dowden, who served as deputy chief of staff under David Cameron, went to the Cabinet Office, where he'll be able to help coordinate government policy. But there is a pressing need for more political appointees inside No. 10.

The third and biggest problem exposed by the reshuffle is the lack of clarity on what the government is trying to achieve. One of those who kept their job on Monday complains that 'the problem is not the people in

One minister compares her to the Wizard of Oz — there's little there when you pull back the curtain

the cabinet or the ministerial positions' but rather May herself. This minister compares her to the Wizard of Oz — there's little there when you pull back the curtain.

I understand that Theresa May was so keen to move Justine Greening because she was frustrated by her approach to social mobility. But parliamentary arithmetic means that grammar schools are off the agenda, so it is hard to work out what May wants to do in this area.

There are indications that Greening and Jo Johnson, the Universities Minister, were shifted because No. 10 wants to do something on tuition fees. It would be sensible, for instance, to cut the interest rate on them. But the Tories will never be able to beat Corbyn's pledge to scrap them. It would be foolish to highlight this issue with a Dutch auction on

the fee level that the Tories can never win.

Several of the moves in this reshuffle are at least sensible. Putting health and social care in the same department, something No. 10 insists would have happened whoever was Health Secretary, will help to integrate the two. David Lidington, one of the politest men in politics, will be a natural fit at the Cabinet Office. He knows more about European politics than almost anyone else in government and will bring that knowledge — which is all too often missing — to the inner cabinet's Brexit discussions. David Gauke's appointment means that a lawyer is once more Lord Chancellor. He also understands the link between the benefits system and prison, having been Welfare Secretary. But the level of turnover in the Minister of Justice and the Department for Work and Pensions is alarming. There have been four Justice Secretaries since the 2015 election and five Welfare Secretaries.

One other thing May deserves praise for is beginning the process of promoting the talented 2015 crop of Tory MPs. This is a more diverse intake and by bringing them into government now, she can ensure that they are ready to be promoted to Secretary of State before the Tories go to the country again. As one leading minister tells me: 'The team that goes into the next election will look very different from the team that went into the last.'

Mrs May might not be restored to political health but that doesn't mean she is on her way out. There remains no agreement at the top of the Tory party about who should succeed her. There is, however, a sense that a leadership contest before Brexit happens would simply be too bloody. Indeed, opinion in the cabinet is shifting towards the idea that the moment when it is safe to have a vote is the end of the transition period in 2021, not the actual moment of departure next March.

If May were to continue until then, the new party leader would have only a year and a bit before they had to go to the polls. They would have to make use of every minute of that time to show the country where they wanted to take Britain after Brexit. What May must do in the meantime is ensure that the next election is not lost before her successor even makes it into No. 10.



'Even the Transport Secretary isn't going anywhere.'

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THE SPECTATOR'S NOTES

Charles Moore

Gavin Stamp, who died just before the year's end, will be mourned by many *Spectator* readers. For years, particularly in the 1980s, he was the paper's main voice on architectural questions, notably as they affected the public space. His voice, both angry and compassionate, would be raised whenever he thought someone in authority — in church, state, local government, big business — was damaging what belonged to the people. He was very important at changing official attitudes imbued with fag-end modernism. No one expounded better the conception of a building's public purpose, so to hear him talk about, say, Lutyens's Memorial to the Missing of the Somme at Thiepval, was revelatory. Gavin made his greatest splash in the paper early in 1985 with his cover piece 'Telephone boxes: reverse the changes'. This led our vigorous campaign to force the newly privatised British Telecom to stop ripping out all its 76,500 K2 and K6 red telephone boxes, designed by Giles Gilbert Scott, perhaps the best pieces of street furniture ever made. At that time, *The Spectator* had just been bought by the Australian Fairfax group, and I had to placate the dismay of one of the Fairfax executives at the 'irrelevance' of it all. In fact, few campaigns have gained such enthusiastic support of readers, or made such a difference, as Gavin's. BT retreated, and started to save the boxes it should never — in the interest of 'rebranding' — have abandoned. In the end, the red box was destroyed by something neither side had foreseen at the time — the all-conquering mobile phone.

Gavin was a man of great loves and hates. The former included nationalised railways, Germany, Frank Pick of the London Passenger Transport Board and John Betjeman. The latter included anything rural, fizzy water, food that was complicated to open (e.g. crab) and France. Both in terms of people and things he had a particular tenderness for the odd, neglected and unfashionable. He was an unusual mixture of the dogmatic and the open-minded — denouncing some architect, politician or philosophy, yet ready to welcome the new as well. He hated being in a gang. His politics shifted



from right to left and yet, to a large extent, his views remained the same. Perhaps he was seeking a home for his historically minded, religious, organic idea of urban civilisation in which what was built dignified the people who inhabited it and what he called the 'respectable working class' could thrive. He had an instinctive dislike of anything to do with money, and was therefore poor. Gavin was a romantic and so was often disappointed by the world as it is. But this made his kindness and humour all the more enchanting. My best memories of Gavin are of striding round the East End of London, with him showing me hidden architectural marvels. If we passed through a market, he would find some amazing piece of architectural salvage, buy it on the spot and lug it home on his great shoulders. 'Salvage' was the right word for what Gavin did, rescuing beauty with the same love and effort that some people rescue refugees.

Carrie Gracie is more or less in the right, but I did laugh out loud when I heard her, on the BBC programme she was herself presenting, say that her resignation from her post as China editor over the equal pay issue had brought wonderful sympathy from 'across the country and internationally', as though speaking of the plight of the Rohingya. People who earn six-figure salaries and are allowed, by the organisation which employs them, to complain on air to millions about an aspect of their pay are not easy for most of us to regard as persecuted victims. Even Ms Gracie's 'resignation' from her Beijing post seems to permit her to stay on the staff. Hers are what young people call 'first-world problems'. The serious problem with BBC presenters' and executive pay is that it is much too high for a service funded by a compulsory tax on everyone with a television. Public service broadcasting

should require public service salaries. Carrie Gracie made that point when she said — though she didn't quite put it like this — that she didn't want her pay to go up, but for that of her male equivalents to go down.

Last Saturday's Court Circular, published in Monday's papers, reports: 'Today being the Feast of the Epiphany, a Sung Eucharist was held in the Chapel Royal, St James's Palace, when the customary offerings of Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh were made on behalf of The Queen by Air Vice-Marshal David Hobart and Brigadier Jonathan Bourne-May (Gentlemen Ushers to Her Majesty).' This is a charming custom, but why are there only two Gentlemen Ushers to represent the Three Wise Men? Defence cuts?

Our family's Epiphany custom is the Christmas card game. The Christmas cards received are dealt out in equal hands. Each player, in turn, calls his own trumps. So it could be 'fattest robin', 'most unChristmassy', 'woolliest', or whatever. All must follow suit if they can. The cards played are then submitted (only the front of the card counts) for general arbitrament, which can become heated. This year, I called out 'happiest family' and played a lovely picture of Nicholas and Georgia Coleridge and their four children taken at Nick's 60th birthday party at the V&A last year. My wife, however, who has a ruthless streak in such games, played an Italian Renaissance painting, 'Madonna worshipping the Child'. I countered that the circumstances of the birth of Jesus might have made the family quite unhappy (in the short term), whereas the Coleridges, united and content at the end of Nick's long and successful reign at Condé Nast, had no worries. Besides, I went on, since neither Joseph nor the Holy Spirit was depicted on my wife's card, this was not a full family. Caroline, however, insisted that the Holy Family must, for theological reasons, be the happiest family ever, and indeed the Nativity is one of the Seven Joys of Mary. I lost. She won the entire game, with twice as many tricks as anyone else.

Twitter inquisition

No one should ever assume that their online past won't catch up with them

LARA PRENDERGAST

A friend of mine at university had a rule: he didn't want anything to appear online that might ruin a future political career. On nights out, when photos were being taken, he'd quietly move out of the picture. While we were all wittering away to each other on social media, he kept schtum. Strange, I remember thinking. Why so paranoid?

I thought of my friend when Toby Young started making headlines. After Toby was appointed one of the 14 non-executive members of the Office for Students, he discovered to his cost that his past — preserved as it is online — could be dredged up by those who wanted to sabotage his advancement. The campaign against him worked. The Twitterstorm gathered such strength that it sucked in newspapers and politicians. His old tweets ended up being debated in parliament. The Prime Minister was asked about sentences from articles Toby had written 17 years ago. After eight days of outrage, he resigned.

Just two weeks ago, the fate of Toby Young would have been of interest to *Spectator* readers, possibly a few free school enthusiasts, but not a great many others. Yet his resignation from an advisory post to an obscure quango led the BBC morning news — ahead of the cabinet reshuffle. It's baffling: why is everyone, seemingly, talking about a journalist having to leave a minor government body that nobody had heard of?

The answer is that Toby has become just the latest — and perhaps the highest-profile — target of a new phenomenon: the digital inquisition. It is something that anyone wanting to enter public life can — and should — expect. As my university friend knew, if you happen to be ambitious in the internet age, you must be very careful about everything you say or do online.

I need not repeat the litany of Toby's offending tweets. He said some bad things. He has been deliberately provocative. He

deployed what Boris Johnson called his 'caustic wit' on occasions where silence would have been wiser. Some will consider him beyond the pale; others will be unable to see what the fuss is about. For now, however, the court of social media has passed judgment, and there is no place harsher or more frenetically outraged.

Sites such as Facebook and Twitter hold vast reserves of information about us, which we have willingly handed over. We have been encouraged to be honest, to share, to joke, often in the name of liberty. Twit-

material online to blow up his political ambitions. When he tried to delete his tweets, his detractors were ready. They had already saved everything they considered incriminating.

Tweets never grow old or die: words published years ago can be reposted, fresh as the day they were typed. Remarks from one context can be republished in another. Online comments can now define and destroy you. During the Blair era, Alastair Campbell used to say that if you were the story for more than seven days, you had to

quit. But in those days newspapers decided how long a scandal lasted: they had readers who would tire easily. In the age of social media, there is all the time in the world. People who feel angry enough about something will spend weeks or months keeping a story alive, if that's what it takes to scalp the enemy.

Social media companies have tricked us all. They have lured us into thinking we can lower our guard online and talk candidly as if to friends. They have coaxed us into blurring personal and private worlds in the name of free speech. We have been led to think our comments are ephemeral when nothing could be further from the truth. Tweets are dashed off, then forgotten about — only to be discovered years later by anyone with a bone to pick. We live in a confessional age and are encouraged to reveal all our inner thoughts. What's not encouraged, so much, is to reflect over whether we would be prepared to stand by everything we have said in the future.

When Anthony Scaramucci was appointed Donald Trump's communications director, he set about deleting any tweets that didn't align with his new boss's views. 'Full transparency: I'm deleting old tweets. Past views evolved & shouldn't be a distraction. I serve @POTUS agenda & that's all that matters,' he wrote. But those who managed to save his deleted tweets were able to



ter users are scored on how many tweets they have shared with a grateful world. For Labour's Stella Creasy, it's 75,700; for Piers Morgan it's 110,000. For some, using social media is a form of work; for others, an addiction. The rough-and-tumble can be part of the fun: you say something, see how it goes down, or who'll respond at 1 a.m. Careers have been made on Twitter as well as broken.

In Toby's case, a selection of tweets and articles, some dating back over a decade, were cobbled together to present him as a sexist bigot. He had left enough explosive

show that his comments were anti-gun, pro-gay marriage and concerned about climate change. By way of defence, Scaramucci said that 'gotcha' politics is dead. He soon learnt otherwise.

'Gotcha' politics has not died. It has evolved. Unedited thoughts have never been easier to publish — or find. For my age group, most of our lives have been captured online. By the time anyone born in the new millennium starts to enter public life, there will be masses of images of them and words by them on the internet.

It's no surprise that younger people have started to use technology that offers more privacy as the default. Apps such as Snapchat and Telegram use messaging that self-destructs — or at least pretends to. Instagram's 'story' feature allows you to publish videos that disappear after 24 hours. If Toby had chosen to use Snapchat to voice his opinions instead of Twitter, he might have avoided losing his job. Then again, far fewer people would have heard his opinions.

Yet even the most tech-savvy youngster will soon discover that it's hard, sometimes impossible, to leave no trace, to clean up the photos that others took and pub-

Even the most tech-savvy youngster will soon discover that it's impossible to leave no trace

lished online. The word 'delete' is often a misnomer. This week Kensington Palace announced that Meghan Markle had closed all her social media accounts. It's highly unlikely though that there won't be a record of everything she's said, somewhere. Mass digitisation means that student newspaper articles from the 1960s are now online and searchable. A BBC editor once arrested because he was part of a hard-left protest group; foul language once used by a Treasury minister — it's all there if you know what to search for. Or if someone suddenly decides to look.

This digital trail makes it harder for people to grow up or change path. Toby Young has moved from professional provocateur to education reformer, but the internet remembered his past, and made his political reinvention near impossible. One might have dared hope that, in an era when the capacity to snoop is almost limitless, we would learn to be more forgiving of the failings of others. Instead, the mood is ever more nosy and censorious.

One might also hope that the adults in SW1 would not confuse the Twittersphere with the vox populi. But politicians, ever anxious about public opinion, are irresistibly drawn to any indications of what people think. They can't help trying to find the national mood on social media. Sometimes they take their lead from it, seeking Twitter praise or fearing its censure. This makes

Twitter's relatively small band of loud, regular users the most powerful focus group in the world. Anyone who has spent any time on Twitter will know how frightening that is.

'Is there anything you ought to tell me?' Francis Urquhart asks ambitious MPs in the original *House of Cards*. 'Anything that, should it come to light, might make me think: "I wish I had known that"?' That's a polite way of asking a rude question: is there any dirt? It's now impossible to answer this question, since no one quite knows which of the hundreds, perhaps thousands of digital ghosts from their past may be summoned.

The advent of social media therefore sets a new bar for anyone wanting to enter public life: the trail you leave online will now be used to judge your character. Is your profile clean enough? If not, forget it. Indiscretions, youthful or otherwise, are now immortal sins. This will delight the bureaucratic class, who find it far easier to beat away outsiders or rebels who aspire to a career in politics. This new state of play will also deter anyone who doesn't fancy having their life pored over, their reputation trashed.

The internet dream was that the web would create a more open society. It wouldn't really matter what you said because everyone would feel more liberated. The opposite has happened: increasingly, people are nervous about what they say online for fear of future rebuke. Far from making everyone feel free to speak their minds, the internet has made many of us terrified of self-expression. Toby Young's tale is an extreme example of something that could happen to anybody.

So my university friend's paranoia was warranted. Now, if I search for him online, nothing of interest comes up: a few charitable causes he has supported, a glowing LinkedIn profile, a polished Instagram account with not a single photo that could cause trouble — or so he must assume. It is deliberately anodyne: the perfect starting point for a modern political career.

SPECTATOR.CO.UK/PODCAST

Brendan O'Neill and Dawn Foster on Twitchfork retribution.



'Whatever you do kids, don't become a figure of hate for the left.'

On being a public enemy

TOBY YOUNG

The hardest thing about being the target of a witch hunt is being turned into a pantomime villain. The lies, the distortions, the brutal literalism of the mob, using everything ironic or self-deprecating you've ever said and pretending to take it at face value so they can use it as evidence for the prosecution. It's a kind of show trial.

Not that I wasn't guilty of saying some appalling things. Whenever some ghastly, tasteless tweet was dragged up from years ago, I was filled with a burning sense of shame. I wanted to scream: 'But that's not who I am!' I wanted to point to the good I've done, to plead with people to judge me by my actions, not by some puerile nonsense I dashed off in the middle of the night in 2009 after half a bottle of wine. But it's pointless. The more you try to defend yourself, the more crazed with blood lust the Twitchfork mob becomes.

The power of social media is symptomatic of what Roger Scruton calls the volatile and foundation-less politics of our times. In an age of uncertainty, in which the values that underpinned our society are melting away, people seem to be more attracted to puritanical censure. I despair of the impact this will have on public life. Who will want to serve on a quango from now on, knowing there's a risk that every skeleton in their closet will be dragged out with a view to embarrassing the politician who appointed them? I've been contacted by several friends, hugely distinguished in their professions and with an enormous amount to contribute, to say that after seeing what happened to me they've put all thoughts of public service out of their heads. Arnold Schwarzenegger famously said, when he ran to be governor of California, 'I haven't lived my life in order to become a politician.' Back then, that didn't disqualify him from public office. Today it would.

Can I take this opportunity to thank all those people, including many *Spectator* readers, who've contacted me to offer sympathy and support? It makes a huge difference when you're trying to retain your sanity and sense of self — knowing that there are some people who don't think you're a terrible person. The most moving message I got was a note from a pupil at the West London Free School. She had passed it to one of the teachers and asked him to give it to me. When I read it, I was completely overwhelmed. I've never been so touched by a small gesture of kindness.

Even the Price Suits You!

Every dedicated suit-wearer knows that Hong Kong's master tailors have an enviable reputation for quality, efficiency and price. The only not-inconsiderable snag is that they are ordinarily in Hong Kong whereas most of us ordinarily are not. Seekers after the finest Hong Kong tailoring need not worry any longer. Mr Raja M Daswani, master craftsman and Hong Kong's finest and most respected bespoke tailor, Raja Fashions now travels to the United Kingdom every two months.

On each visit, Team Daswani takes over hotel suites in all of the United Kingdom's major cities, so any of us can make an appointment and get the full Hong Kong Monty practically without jet setting to the far-east. The measurements are done by Mr. Raja and his men here and mailed to Hong Kong along with a series of digital photos of you from every angle. Often, your suit will be started on by a tailor, 6,000 miles away before you've even left the hotel. You can then have it shipped by courier within four weeks if it is urgent-or wait for a second fitting when the Raja team hits your town again a few weeks later.

It is often said that British clothing chains 'have much to fear from Mr. Daswani.' His dedication to bespoke suiting borders on the fanatical. And both his company's quality and pricing are truly shocking-in the pleasantest possible

way for customers, if not for Mr. Daswani's competition over here.

We are talking £58 for a custom made shirt, £350 for a fully lined, made-to-measure suit in a lightweight wool or linen, to £425 for 100 percent wool, entirely hand finished suit in a British cloth, with every refinement from handmade buttonholes to knee lining and double thickness pockets.

Even the most expensive possible Raja Daswani suit made in deluxe cashmere wool for £2,500 comes in at something like a third of the price of the Saville Row equivalent.

In other words, customers can now buy two bespoke, custom cut and hand-stitched suits, made from fine British or Italian cloth and measured by a master tailor for the price of one off-the-peg, chain store suit.

Indeed, making an appointment with Raja Daswani's team is almost the archetypal no-brainer. Why would any British lover of the classic suit NOT?

The Raja revolution, with its inspired mix of artistic flair, entrepreneurial genius and digital technology may well see the end of the traditional, i.e. cheap-looking off the peg chain store suit. It would be a fitting end to a too often ill-fitting icon.



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The Gonville Hotel
Gonville Place, CB1 1LY
Jan 15th-16th

CARDIFF

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Kingsway Cardiff, CF10 3HH
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Hilton Leeds City
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Jan 29th-30th

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LONDON

Novotel London Tower Bridge
10 Pepys Street, EC3N 2NR
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LONDON

The Park Tower Knightsbridge
101 Knightsbridge, SW1X 7RN
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Hilton London Tower Bridge
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LONDON

Hilton London Green Park
Half Moon St, Mayfair, W1J 7BN
Feb 1st-4th

LONDON

Canary Riverside Plaza Hotel
46 Westferry Circus, E14 8RS
Feb 5th-6th

LONDON

Hilton London Euston
17-18 Upper Woburn Pl, WC1H 0HT
Feb 7th-10th

MAIDSTONE

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The power of the 0.1 per cent



I once asked Michael Gove, when he had just been appointed Education Secretary, if he would mind awfully appointing me as chairman of Ofsted: I had one or two vigorous ideas, such as reversing the grades awarded to schools for 'cultural diversity' so that they more closely represented what the overwhelming majority of parents actually think. Michael smiled politely and walked away, which I took as a definite indication of assent. Frankly, I will never forgive the treachery. Gove handed out the job to someone who went native almost immediately, became subsumed by the Blob. Serves him right. I assume Gove, in a cowardly manner, was worried by the possible howl-round of appointing a chap who had once asked readers if they had ever, after a few pints, considered giving one to Harriet Harman. I had been trying to be nice, but there we are.

Michael was clearly terrified of the Twitterstorm, the maniacs on social media sites, the relentless fury of a couple of hundred thousand people, almost all of whom we pay for out of our taxes to carry out their fatuous jobs, if they have any, and who care for freedom of speech and freedom of conscience with the same fervour with which a Tower Hamlets imam cares about the rights of his local LGBTQI folk.

Toby Young got a little further than I did, as part of *The Spectator*'s drive to capture all the major offices of government — Taki in charge of immigration, Charles Moore personally strangling foxes at the Min of Ag and Jeremy Clarke running the MoD — but tendered his resignation when it became evident that it would be shortly tendered for him. The mob works. The mob thinks it is an expression of democracy — and in a sense it is, so long as nobody of importance pays any heed to its eternal, moronic fugue and its bedwetting tantrums.

The problem is that people who should know better, i.e., the government, do take it seriously. Perhaps it is because they are right-wingers: they see that 200,000 people have signed a petition against something and assume that they are just normal people, a bit like them. But they are not. They are the same 200,000 liberal-left wankpuffins who sign every fatuous petition got up by

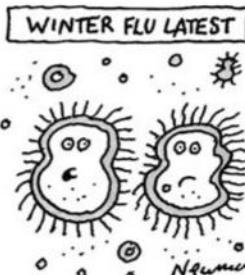
Change.org or 38 Degrees: they are magnificently arrogant in their presumption that because 0.3 per cent of the population have summoned up the ability to click a button, they must have their way.

The first thing, then, is for the government to reappraise the numbers issue. Maybe start taking a mild interest in petitions when they reach about the four million mark — about 6 per cent of the population, instead of promising House of Commons debates as soon as they reach the pitiful figure of 100,000, as is the case now. So, four million, minimum, otherwise ignore them totally. The government is out of date on the numbers, on what constitutes a genuine public feeling.

With Toby Young there was no popular feeling at all — it was just them again.

This is how it works — a few judicious Googles and almost everyone in the country can be found bang to rights

The usual suspects. Take no notice of them, they count for nothing. Because otherwise nobody who is right of centre will ever be able to be appointed to anything. Every time they do, the puffins will begin their work. The fundamentalist wankpuffins will tap 'Toby Young Twitter tits' or 'Rod Liddle Facebook give Harriet one' into Google and rip everything out of context, stripped of nuance and regardless of whether it was uttered 25 years ago — and then the foot-soldier wankpuffins will swallow it whole and tap their little buttons on their laptops for Change.org. That's how it works — a few judicious Googles and almost everyone in the country can be found bang to rights, can be shrieked at and told to resign.



'An apology should get us off the hook.'

The political right, in general, does not behave like this. It does not become beside itself with fury when someone who has views counter to their own is appointed to a post, which is all that happened in the case of Young. For the left, it is all that matters: if he disagrees with me, he must be vile and thus unsuitable.

Toby Young was appointed to a minor role on an obscure education quango because of his exceptional work with free schools. In the education sector there are almost no right-wingers appointed to anything. No visiting professors, or honorary professors. By contrast, the genuinely idiotic journalist Yasmin Alibhai-Brown has been a visiting professor at three universities, despite having said that she wishes white men to be expunged from the face of the earth and that the white working class is 'scum', and having referred to people who voted Leave by the brilliant term 'Brexshitters'. But the right do not get inflamed in quite the same way.

Your history will always come back to haunt you, but only if you are on the right. If you are on the left, it won't matter at all. Just hypothetically speaking, I think it is entirely possible that one could be appointed to a senior position within a left-wing party despite having demanded honours for IRA murderers, supported genocidal terrorist organisations such as Hamas and Hezbollah, and proclaimed an affection for a totalitarian communist dictatorship in, say, Cuba which imprisons trade union leaders and persecutes homosexuals. That's just hypothetically speaking, mind; I can't know for sure.

The problem is not the mob, no matter how fascistic and undemocratic its mindset might be. The puffins have every right to tap their little buttons, to scream and stamp their feet, to howl with anguish. The problem is solely the respect given to it. A *Guardian* editorial column is read by about 100,000 people, 0.1 per cent of the population. It does not matter. And nor does double that number signing a petition. It is time the right wised up to this and acquired from somewhere the semblance of a spine.



So much to do, so much time.



CUNARD

QUEEN MARY 2

ANCIENT AND MODERN

Madman at the helm



Whatever one makes of the accuracy of the journalist Michael Wolff's depiction of President Trump, it cannot all be the product of an overheated imagination. What makes it so interesting is that his picture of total dysfunctionality is typical of Roman historians' accounts of many emperors.

Suetonius (d. c. AD 125), for example, was a high-ranking imperial secretary to the emperor Hadrian. In his *Lives of the Caesars*, he covered the period from Julius Caesar, Augustus and all the other early emperors — most notoriously Caligula and Nero — through to Domitian (d. AD 96).

Take his portrait of the viciously self-indulgent Caligula. His desire to humiliate senators and officials and to put on shows, dress up, act, sing and dance, made him very popular with the people. Consuls who forgot his birthday were stripped of office for three days. He ordered the death or exile of senators, friends and relatives with complete insouciance. His dark humour reflected his actions: 'I can do anything I please, to anybody' was his mantra.

He demanded that the finest Greek statues of the gods be brought to Rome, and have their heads replaced with his. He set up a temple to himself and would invite the full moon to share his bed. He acquired and got rid of wives almost at random, made a habit of seducing women of distinguished families, detailing their performance in bed, and indulged in incest with his sisters. Unsurprisingly, he wanted to abolish all lawyers. Suetonius commented that the previous emperor Tiberius, his adoptive grandfather, got it right: in Caligula, he said, he was rearing a viper for the Roman people.

Much of this material does read like invention, fed into the record by sources hostile to Caligula. But in the light of Wolff's revelations about Trump, maybe Suetonius was right. The saving grace is that a country's institutions and public servants keep it on the road, however pathological its leadership. If the Roman Empire could survive for half a millennium, the USA can probably survive Trump.

— Peter Jones

A bird-brained scheme

There are billions being wasted to keep people and nests apart

MELISSA KITE

While walking or riding on the beautiful heathland near my home, I have noticed a growing number of signs telling me to respect ground-nesting birds.

I keep the dogs close. I don't let the horses trample through the undergrowth. But that is not proving good enough for the wildlife authorities who have begun to spend millions of pounds on a bizarre programme to divert human beings from large areas of heathland — not only where I walk but in dozens of other places across the south-east of England, so that these popular beauty spots can be left for the birds.

Natural England (the government agency for conservation) and local authorities in Surrey, Berkshire and Hampshire are campaigning to safeguard what they called SPAs, Special Protection Areas, by creating something they call SANGS, which is so loony that no one can agree whether it stands for Suitable Accessible Natural Green Space or Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space. Either way, welcome to the wacky world of rare-bird protection.

In this world, you, the human being living in an area known to conservationists as the Thames Basin SPAs, will be dissuaded from visiting your local heathland and instructed to go instead to a disused farm down the road, for example, where your local authority and wildlife chiefs have created for you an approximation of the favourite place you thought you were enjoying and appreciating but in fact were ruining. Allegedly.

The policy covers 8,274 hectares of Berkshire, Hampshire and Surrey, including Ockham and Wisley Common, where I walk and ride, and Whitmoor Common near Guildford, where I used to walk until I got fed up of being accosted by environmentalists brandishing leaflets telling me how many birds I was slaughtering just by being there.

There are three rare species in these heaths: woodlark, nightjar and Dartford warbler. They nest in small numbers on or near the ground and are susceptible to predation and disturbance.

On Ockham and Wisley, for example, recent surveys show up to seven Dartford warbler nests, four woodlark and five nightjar. On Whitmoor, there are two Dartford warbler nests, no woodlark and four nightjar. In total, there are around 1,000 of these pro-

tected bird nests in all three counties. Natural England believes that 'recreational use' of the heaths, having risen thanks to housing developments and population increase, is why the birds are struggling, although there is good evidence that their numbers are not struggling at all.

As a result, all housing development within five kilometres of each SPA is now subject to stringent tests and impact assessments. In effect, all house-building near some SPAs has pretty much stopped.

But don't worry. You, recreational user, are going to be given a Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space to walk in. Whoopie!

Now, I have never seen a sign near where I walk telling me to go anywhere else, but Natural England insists: 'Since 2008, 51 Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces [sic] have been created, relieving pressure on habitats and species.' Natural England boasts that SANGS are only going to work if they are 'more attractive than the SPA to users of the kind that currently visit the SPA'.

Eleven local authorities in three counties could be planning to spend well over a billion pounds

It would appear hubristic to think it possible to create beauty spots more attractive than the purple-carpeted heathlands established over hundreds of years by generations of livestock grazing and scrub clearance.

In practice, over the next 125 years, Guildford Borough Council is spending £12.2 million on one SANGS alone, raised through a tally on developers. This is a piece of land called Tyting Farm. Their method reads like a handbook for crushing the soul: 'It should be possible to complete a circular walk of 2.3-2.5km around the SANGS,' the guidance from Natural England sets out. The SANGS will have 'a gently undulating topography... and a view...with a monument or something to visit...' It will 'provide a variety of habitats for users to experience...'

'Hills do not put people off visiting a site, particularly when these are associated with a good view, but steep hills are not appreciated. An undulating landscape is preferred...'

It is utter madness trying to quantify and then replicate a beauty spot. And what happens when a Dartford warbler pitches up at the alternative? Do they then have to create

another alternative to protect the original alternative? Nevertheless, a housing levy on all new housing in the centre of Guildford for the next 125 years of some £6,500 per house has been put in place, to be paid for by developers.

In its draft plan, the council has estimated it will raise anything between £64 million and £90 million to develop SANGS to safeguard the small number of nests in its area. If you extrapolate that, 11 local authorities in three counties could be planning to spend well over a billion pounds. According to critics, that's a punitive tax on development in an area where housing (for humans) is desperately needed and which is likely to increase house prices in the south-east.

And that's before you consider the insanity that you, recreational user, are going to be told to drive three miles further to walk around a new beauty spot so that six or seven bird nests are not disturbed. Even if you have been drinking the environmentalist Kool-Aid and want to help these birds, there is scant evidence that your absence will help them. The latest stats show that the rare bird population is at virtually the same numbers as in 1998.

Wildlife Trust insiders tell me that bad weather was to blame for numbers declining in the past and that global warming had boosted them. What's more, in a letter,

the environment minister Thérèse Coffey recently advised that numbers have been 'normalised'. So why the rush to spend a billion pounds diverting walkers, with near hysteria in official circles over visitor numbers?

Official surveys suggest that more than 83 per cent of visitors to SPAs arrive by car. A large proportion are dog walkers, many of whom visit on a more or less daily basis, it says. So we know who is trampling through the nests, then. Or do we?

As someone who has walked and ridden on Ockham for 15 years, I have noticed a big increase in visitors straying off the marked

Those visitors straying off the marked paths are not people walking dogs – they are dogging

paths, but these people are not walking dogs. They are dogging.

Every day, dozens of cars pull up, driven by mostly men, but some women too, who disappear into the wooded areas of the heath to have sex with each other, leaving behind rubbish including condoms.

When I last wrote about this, I was told by council chiefs and police that this behaviour is not aggressively tackled because Ockham Common has been officially designated a 'Public Sex Environment' (PSE).

These people's sexual preference is to do

it outdoors and so, like the ground-nesting birds, their rights must be respected. But when the rights of ground-nesting birds come up against the rights of ground-nesting doggers, the left-leaning environmental lobby truly is in a fix, isn't it?

Is the precious heathland nearest to London a habitat for rare birds, or is it a habitat for middle-managers stopping off for illicit open-air sex on the way home? It seems that it cannot be both.

I tried to get an official to respond to this, to no avail. A Surrey Wildlife source said: 'You won't get anyone to comment on that. No one wants to talk about it. But broadly speaking, the birds don't nest in the wooded areas.' Fine, but the point remains that the big rise in visitor numbers might not be from dog walkers but from doggers. And I don't see anyone working out how to divert them. What, therefore, is the point of the SANGS initiative?

'We have a duty to preserve our natural habitat so that future generations can enjoy the countryside,' says a spokesman for Guildford Borough Council. No doubt. But defending our vulnerable heathlands from truly invasive human behaviours would require the authorities to confront a minority group more powerful than the Dartford warbler. And the idea that anyone would do that really is for the birds.

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Girl power

Educating girls may fix the world's remaining problems

BORIS JOHNSON

The world is blessed with a brilliant and industrious UN secretary-general, and it was certainly worth tuning in last week to watch António Guterres deliver his New Year message to the planet. As season's greetings go, it was not exactly festive.

Intercut with shots of attack choppers and bombed-out cities, the UN secretary-general discharged a one-and-a-half minute jeremiad in which we learned that inequality was deepening; global warming was out of control; xenophobia and nationalism were on the march, not to mention war, famine, pestilence and other afflictions, as though 2018 were beginning with a positive cavalry charge of apocalyptic horsemen.

He was putting out an alert, he said, a 'red alert' on the state of humanity. One diplomatic friend told me it was the UN's most bloodcurdling New Year message in 30 years.

António is of course right, in that the world faces a series of interconnected challenges that require us to unite, and also to get behind the UN, to back António Guterres and his teams in every unfolding crisis: Yemen, Libya, Burma, South Sudan, north-east Nigeria, Somalia and in many other places. The UN secretary-general is bringing a much-needed drive and focus to the job. He deserves our collective support, and will get it from the UK.

It would be a shame, however, if anyone were to be so downcast by his words as to believe that the world is indeed teetering on the lip of some new dark ages. I am conscious that some people are now so hungry for bad news they might misconstrue the secretary-general's message. They might conclude that things are genuinely going backwards. Are you inclined to that kind of pessimism? If so (and even if you aren't), allow me to put a contrary point of view. Yes, as António

Guterres says, the world has problems — largely caused by the inordinate triumphs of the human race over some of the things that made our ancestors most miserable and afraid. There is also a respectable case for saying that this is the best moment — ever — to be alive.

Wherever you look, the armies of disease are being driven in headlong rout. Never mind the victories over smallpox, or leprosy. We have virtually wiped out polio, we are zapping tuberculosis, and as for

the next 12 years the average South Korean woman will live to be 90 — the average. And our quality of life is improving: poverty, malnutrition, child mortality — they are all falling.

It can never be repeated too often that 28 years ago, in 1990, there were 1.8 billion living in absolute poverty. Today that figure has been reduced by a billion to fewer than 800,000 in poverty, and is falling — in spite of the extra billions the world has acquired in the interim. I venture to say that we are living through the most spectacular reduction in inequality — and the greatest improvement in the overall condition of mankind — since Olduvai.

Our lives are spiced, our taste buds piqued with pleasures undreamt of by our grandparents; and not only is our food much better, but we have the continuous ocular stimulation of machines enabled by an internet whose pace and convenience accelerates everywhere, even in rural England.

As a species we seem less engaged in fighting each other than ever before. It is an astonishing reflection on our international relations that in 2016 and 2017 there was not a single British soldier killed on active service anywhere in the world — for the first time in 50 years. And for the first time in 60 years there was not a single worldwide fatality involving a commercial passenger jet — a fact for which President Trump was swift to take credit.

Even the world's potholes are disappearing. Compared with only ten years ago, the proportion of tarmac roads across the planet has risen from 53 per cent to 64 per cent — a fact that surely deserves a presidential tweet. The overall result is that our ride is literally as well as metaphorically smoother.

We (i.e. the human race) are living longer, in better health, and with higher levels



HIV patients, they now live almost as long as someone without the virus. We are making enormous progress — notably in this country — in using the body's own immune system to fight cancer; and thousands of patients are staging recoveries that would have been thought miraculous when I was a child.

Across the world, life expectancy is increasing so fast that we are all gaining, on average, an extra five hours every 24 (I know it sounds a bit like Zeno's paradox, as though we are fated never to make the grave, but it's true). It is estimated that in

of comfort, education and all-round entertainment; and that is why all the data suggests that, in so far as the concept makes any sense, people are also happier. And it is that very triumph — especially of mankind over disease — that has created and exacerbated the problems we must address.

Think about the UN secretary-general's list. We have an arc of instability from South Asia to the Middle East to North Africa, a horrible poxy belt of civil wars and proxy wars. We have governments and societies that are struggling to provide leadership, struggling to provide unity. But, above all, they are struggling to provide a credible economic programme in the face of unprecedented large numbers of young people. That is the root problem.

It is precisely because we beat infant typhoid and diphtheria that we now have a population explosion, again, in Africa, the Middle East and South Asia; and everywhere that you find insecurity and instability you will also find huge numbers of young people with not enough by way of gainful employment. Look at Yemen, whose gun-wielding

The human race is living longer, in better health, and with higher levels of comfort and education

Houthi rulers are mainly under 30. Look at Egypt, or Pakistan, both of which are set to see their populations top 200 million in the next 30 years. These countries will have to create tens of millions of new jobs every year if they are to meet the needs of their young.

Of all the apocalyptic horsemen, overpopulation — by which I mean the growth of restless and surplus labour — is once again the hardest-charging of the lot. As a global phenomenon, it is by no means universal. Things are going the other way in Japan (where they have the highest living standards in the world) and in much of the West. And that gives us the clue about the solution.

Look at those countries where population is growing the fastest, where unemployment is highest, and where the tensions are greatest, and without exception you will find a common factor: female illiteracy.

The correlation is astonishing. Look at the high birth rate countries of sub-Saharan Africa and you will find female illiteracy running at 50, 60, sometimes 70 per cent plus. In Pakistan it is 66 per cent among adult women; 34 per cent even in India. Small wonder that India's population is set to overtake that of China, where female illiteracy has been all but eliminated.

Yes, it really is that simple. It is not only a moral outrage. It is directly contrary to the interests of world peace, prosperity, health and happiness that such a huge proportion of our population — so many women and girls — should be unable to participate, alongside their brothers, in the economic

Shove Your Tissues

The man wears chinos and a flannel shirt,
a zip-up fleece and odd socks:
one is more beige.

His face, as creased and faded as his shirt,
reminds me of Guernica, but without the light bulb,
or the nostrils.

If I did tell him about my penchant
for being led astray
by the man who holds a dog lead in one hand,
himself in the other,
he'd hurl himself at the space
where a window used to be,
then I'd have to counsel him.

He asks why I have my arms folded;
I ask why he doesn't.
'What would your present self say to your former self?'
'She'd say you're a prick.'
(Other self nods.)

He writes down 'transference' and looks
at the clock I'm not supposed to notice
behind my head.

— Samantha Roden

life of their country. Female education is the universal spanner, the Swiss army knife that helps tackle so many of the problems that António Guterres describes. Societies where women can read, write and do maths as efficiently as their male counterparts will be healthier, happier, more prosperous, with stabler populations and therefore with fewer alienated and maladjusted young men whose egos require them to think of women as childbearing chattels.

A few years ago I met Malala, shot by the Taliban for daring to equip herself with an

education. She is a person of extraordinary intensity and persuasiveness. I have come to believe that she is basically right: that the single best and biggest thing we can do for the world is to make sure that every girl gets 12 years of full-time education.

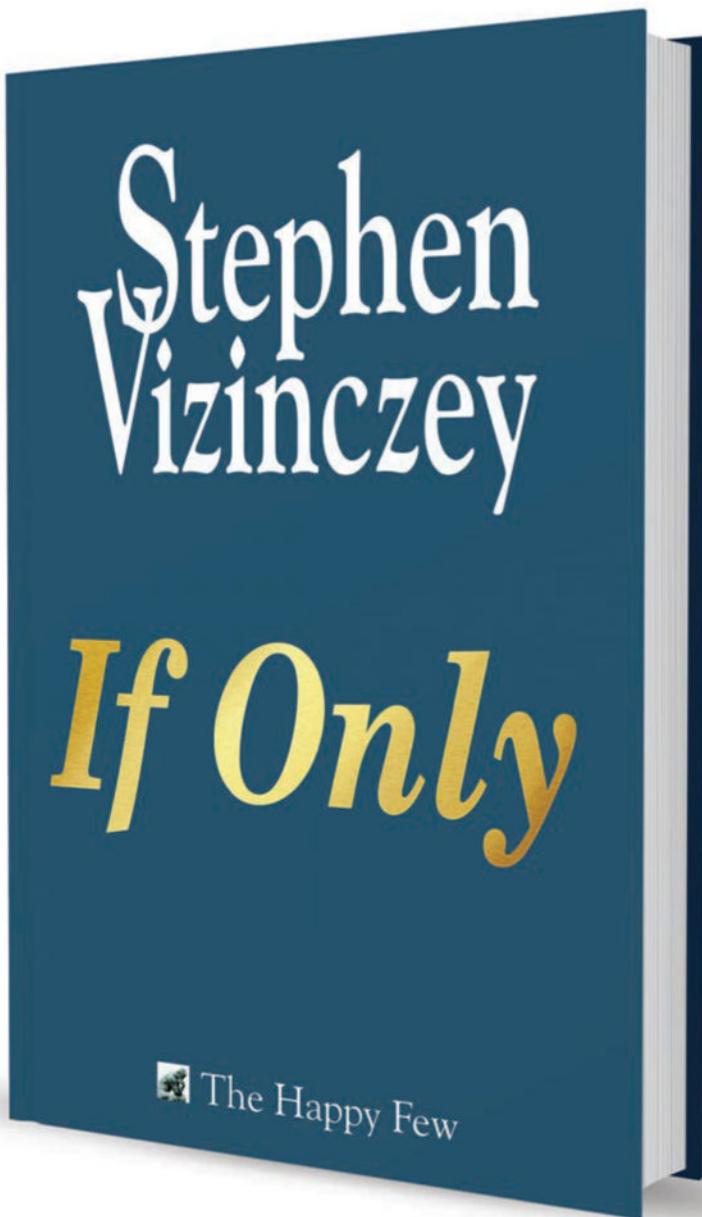
That ambition is at the heart of UK overseas policy — shared by Penny Mordaunt's DFID and the FCO — and will be at the heart of the Commonwealth summit in April. It is not just a campaign for fairness and freedom, but in its essential contraceptive impact it will help to fix so many other problems: not just overpopulation and poverty, but the threat of war, disorder, terrorism, climate change and the loss of habitat and species.

The lesson of the past few decades is that homo sapiens have seen off the doomsters with consummate style. Man keeps conquering the challenges, from famine to disease. But if we are to solve the problems of today, Man the wise needs to stop being such a damn fool about the education of girls.

Twelve years of full-time education is not the only answer to the world's problems. It is not a panacea. But it is not far short.



By the author of *In Praise of Older Women* and *An Innocent Millionaire*



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Victims of crime should not decide justice



Hard cases make bad law. The release on parole of the 'black cab rapist', John Worboys, is a hard case. But ministers should not be panicked into throwing open parole board decision-making to public inspection.

The police have blundered, the sentence was surely too lenient, and the failure to inform his victims was disgraceful. But it was not upon some careless whim that Parliament barred parole boards from giving reasons, and the new Justice Secretary, David Gauke, should think hard before reversing the interdiction.

Much of the furore provoked by the release of this serial attacker of women after ten years in prison really arises not from the parole board's decision but the original sentence and the flawed prosecution process which helped produce it. Given Worboys's conviction for only one rape, though there may have been scores more that the Metropolitan Police and the Crown Prosecution Service did not pursue, the indeterminate sentence with a minimum of eight years failed to reflect a terrible story, but judge and jury were not to know that; and once the sentence had been handed down it was inevitable that the parole board would be asked to consider release before Worboys was an old man and while memories of his atrocities were still relatively fresh.

And when the board did that it presumably based its decision partly on what had been proved in court, not on what arguably should have been proved in court. So we need to understand the circumstances in which the board found itself before we declare it obvious that its members should have taken a different decision. Not to have told Worboys's victims of his impending release was an inexcusable administrative oversight; but this must be distinguished from the issue of whether parole boards' decisions should be open to challenge.

For that would be the result of what is being called for. There can be no point — and there would fast be seen to be no point — in disclosing reasons for a ruling if the ruling were nevertheless final. Indeed the reasoning behind the demand for disclosure in the Worboys case must surely be that the ruling ought to have been challenged. Other

such cases would sooner or later arise. The press would develop a case for discovering a sense of outrage every time a palpably unsavoury character was given parole.

It would then not be long before the demand arose for a procedure for appealing against a release on parole, either by victims, or the CPS, or a wider public, or a new body set up to allow or disallow appeals. These demands would often be made against the backdrop of a wave of media-driven or social media-driven indignation, with the original crime reheated for a new readership, and the victims paraded through the newspapers with their stories, their recollections and (often enough) their own voices raised against the granting of parole.

A victim's view of what the law should decree or how a miscreant should be punished should have no special status

There would also have to be provision made for the redacting, where necessary, of information about parole boards' reasons for rulings. There will obviously be a range of sensitivities and privacies — about victims, about psychiatric and medical opinion and advice, about the special and private circumstances of some prisoners, perhaps even about new suggestive evidence that has arisen — which might make it inappropriate to put some reasoning into the public domain.

The board could not just omit to mention such matters, which would often be germane to the decision taken; so it would have to disclose that there were matters it was not disclosing. This would then lead to new suspicions and challenges from those questioning the ruling. Calls would follow for an appointee or committee to see the redacted material and adjudicate on its suppression.



The sort of thinking that is pushing us down roads like this arises from two modern tendencies of which we should be wary. The first is the growing presumption that everything can be challenged, appealed or ordered for review. The second is the growing centrality of the victim when things go wrong.

I've been struck over my own lifetime by the retreat of the idea that important decisions may be final. The advance of the judicial review has meant that ministers, civil servants, businesses and civil organisations have found that matters which had once seemed entirely their own affair are now subject (or, more distractingly, might prove subject) to judicial review. Before expelling a rogue member of a political party or awarding a franchise to a rail operator, you have to consider your vulnerability to challenge in the courts. When I first entered Parliament, it seemed unexceptionable that a Speaker's ruling on whether to grant an emergency debate should be accompanied by the Speaker's reminder that his decision was final and no reasons could be supplied. Today it sounds almost archaic.

To some degree these new vulnerabilities to challenge and appeal represent an advance for equity. But they can cause great uncertainty and interminable delay. There have to be limits. I think we're nearing them.

The growing centrality of the victim may represent, likewise, an advance for compassion and fairness. But this can easily court a sort of retributive primitivism in our approach to law. We should care deeply for victims of crime. Perhaps (though I'm doubtful) the state should compensate them. We should be sensitive to their continuing hurt. But the law is there to protect society at large, and a victim's view of what law should decree or how a miscreant should be punished should have no special status. The modern media, however, and many modern politicians, are beginning to speak as though the victim should be part of the judicial process itself. This may be prejudicial to justice.

I have no shred of sympathy for John Worboys. I am appalled that he should be let out. But I seek no way of challenging or reversing this decision. Perhaps I should reconsider my enthusiasm for a second EU referendum.

Many people are gloomy about 2018.
But some things are improving every year...

Natural disasters

These killed **9,066** people in the world in 2017, fewer than any year since 1979. From 2008 to 2017 an average **72,020** died in such disasters. Fifty years earlier (the period 1958–67) the average was **373,453**.

Life expectancy

The current lowest in the world is the Central African Republic with 51.4 years. To put that into perspective, in 1800 Belgium had the highest at just 40 years. Average life expectancy changes in Africa since 1955:

YEAR	AGE	YEAR	AGE
1955	38.7	1995	51.9
1965	43.4	2005	55.1
1975	47.6	2015	61.4
1985	51.2		

Hunger

The number of people in the world classed as undernourished fell from 1.01 billion in 1991 to **815 million** in 2016. This is despite the world's population growing from 5.4 billion to **7.4 billion** in the meantime.

Child labour

From 2000–2012 the percentage of children involved in regular economic activity in the world fell from 23 per cent to **17 per cent**.

Democracy

The proportion of countries which are democracies rose from 24 per cent in 1976 to **58 per cent** in 2016.

Every day around the world

- The number of people living in extreme poverty falls by **217,000**.
- An extra **300,000** people gain access to a supply of fresh water.
- **325,000** more people gain access to an electricity supply.

Source for all the above: ourworldindata.org

Wronged men

Chris Grayling was initially wrongly named as the new Conservative party chairman. The mistake is far from unique:

- In 1997 Tony Blair made **Bernard Donoughue** agriculture minister after offering it to **Brian Donohoe** in error.
- In 2010 David Cameron appointed Lib Dem **Ed Davey** as a business minister. Tory **Ed Vaizey** says the post was first offered to him by mistake only to be taken away 30 minutes later.

Smooth operators

Is expensive private surgery always necessary?

JAMES GROGONO

In George Bernard Shaw's play *The Doctor's Dilemma*, written early last century, the knife-happy surgeon invents a nut-shaped abdominal organ, the 'nuciform sac'. It is situated near the appendix, 'full of decaying matter', and requires removal, assuming the patient can afford the fee. The surgeon, Cutler Walpole, has the line: 'The operation ought to be compulsory.'

Bernard Shaw labours the point that removal of the nuciform sac equals 500 guineas, and not removing it equals nought guineas. He then suggests, wickedly, that we want our surgeons to be mortal, 'quite as honest as most of us', not God-like. Which of us, he asks, would not be influenced by the financial equation, if it is impossible to prove that this organ might be better left in situ? Add in the need to pay for a Harley Street consulting room, school fees, and a wife with expensive

py, colonoscopy, laparoscopy and many more. The reason given by your private doctor is always that serious pathology such as cancer is best diagnosed early, and these modern 'look-see' operations are relatively small and safe compared with the old days, when a 'look inside' was itself a major procedure.

Of course the reason is often valid, and indeed therapeutic, such as knee arthroscopy for a torn cartilage, where the diagnosis is confirmed, and curative treatment carried out at the same time through a minute incision. However the arthroscopy epidemic has spread to many smaller joints, where the view is tiny, and the chance of finding serious or treatable disease equally tiny. In other situations, the search for early cancer is often genuine, such as any patient who has seen blood in urine or faeces or vomit or phlegm. But patients with nebulous symptoms should beware.

How could a caring surgeon, with a clear conscience, put a patient through the risks of an anaesthetic and a procedure that it would be difficult to describe as necessary? What you have to remember is the complication rates of unnecessary surgery are very low. Wounds heal better if uninhabited by the presence of disease. The full benefits of the placebo effect add on to the likelihood of success. Patients like being told they need an operation. It's a simple solution. The patient has already had the satisfaction of knowing 'it was bad enough to require an operation'. Even the passing of money increases the desire for success. No one — patient or surgeon — wishes to think the fee was wasted.

Do I sound cynical? Yes, but a healthy cynicism is no bad thing in all aspects of life, including medicine. Having an awareness of the pitfalls is all I am advocating. Time and again, in recent years, living in wealthy non-medical communities, I have listened to tales of remunerative procedures on friends and acquaintances that just don't 'stack up' in terms of vital need. My own operating days are long past, but I remember my father, an Essex GP, pushing *The Doctor's Dilemma* across the breakfast table to me when I was a pre-medical student. I was suitably appalled, but put the matter on one side for a decade. I then found myself drawn to a career in surgery, with no time for anything except the long, tough vocational training.

Fast-forward another few years and I was in my first year as a consultant general surgeon in High Wycombe. I felt I had arrived in paradise. The work was entirely NHS, and there was soon more than I could easily handle. No patient needed to worry about the cost of their operation, however great. I had to focus on the cases that required my so-called skills, and exercise some degree of appropriate delegation.

I have the lists of operations I performed in four busy weeks spread over those early years. The average was ten major, six intermediate and five minor procedures each week. The word 'major' indicates any abdominal operation, mainly bowel surgery or gallstones, or, outside the abdomen, removal of the breast, prostate or thyroid gland. 'Intermediate' indicates operations such as hernia, varicose veins or piles, and 'minor' indicates removal of cysts or skin lesions or vasectomy. The 'oscopies' were rare in those days, but were classified as 'intermediate'.

After the first few months something unexpected happened. GPs started asking me to see occasional private cases. How was I to overcome the doctor's dilemma? How would I know my motives for suggesting some expensive op were not self-interested?

My answer was to apply what I think of as the NHS test: would you still operate if there were no financial gain? My NHS

income was adequate. I consulted in my own home with my wife as my secretary, and thus had no overheads. The NHS test meant that I would sometimes veer away from intervention, perhaps wrongly, but always in the best interest of patients. My NHS thinking cost me further referrals from at least one GP: 'I asked you to operate on her varicose veins, not tell her she could wear a support stocking and keep them.'

Over time, the level of private medical insurance increased. South Bucks was an affluent area, and the amount of pri-

Surgeons should apply what I call the NHS test: would you still operate if there were no financial gain?

vate work also went up. For a short spell I rented a room in Harley Street one half-day a month, at minimal cost. This enabled local GPs to tell their patients that they did not need to travel to London to see a 'Harley Street surgeon' if that was their wish.

The challenge then became one of time allocation, never short-changing NHS commitments for private practice. I also had a personal fetish about never having an NHS waiting list. No patient had to 'go private' to get the operation done. At times the workload was almost overwhelming, but that

in itself made for safety. A busier surgeon is a better surgeon for reasons I'll explain.

The only way to try to establish that your operation, whatever its nature, is truly necessary is to apply an NHS test too — to go through the diagnosing and referring process. Once the decision is made then you may wish to declare your private insurance, and ask for the great man's private phone number. You'll then have the choice of time, place and creature comforts in hospital. Your surgeon is contracted to do the operation himself, a promise that must not be made in an NHS setting, although it may be implied — 'none of my juniors know how to do this operation', for example. You will be reducing the pressure on the NHS, where you may or may not get speedy and excellent service.

The bigger your operation, the more quickly you are likely to be dealt with on the NHS. Long waits are probable for procedures for hernia, piles and varicose veins, but your turn will come, and your operation will be competently done.

There is one more word of caution. Make sure that your surgeon is very busy in his NHS practice, and not looking for cases to fill his operating lists. It is safer for patients if the surgeon has too much work. He will then choose to operate only on the patients who will benefit most, and those on the borderland of necessity will not have an operation.

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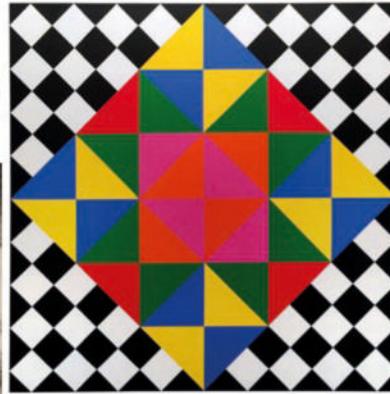
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A D U T Y *to* D E L I G H T
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When therapy does more harm than good



In the churchyard by the church near my grandmother's house, there's a tombstone with an inscription that's haunted me since I was a child. It marks the grave of a woman called Elizabeth who died, as I remember, in the 1920s. Elizabeth married young, had five babies in five years, then died well before she reached 30. The epitaph on her stone: 'She did her duty.'

I often find myself thinking about Elizabeth and how different her cold and stoic age was to ours. I thought of her late last year as a slew of research revealed that an astonishing number of women, more than one in ten, screen positive for PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). We associate PTSD with soldiers back from some grisly frontline but as it turns out, twice as many women as men display symptoms: flashbacks, disassociation, unmanageable anxiety. This isn't self-indulgent self-diagnosis; it's real suffering.

Women can be shell-shocked by life. It's surprising — and it's not. Consider Elizabeth. All sorts of recent studies show that giving birth, even to a healthy baby, can be traumatising. Most new mothers wobble like light aircraft in turbulence, then stabilise and carry on. A number nosedive. More than 8 per cent of mothers in America and in Canada develop PTSD after childbirth. Then on top of the ordinary grind there's life's sucker punches: losing a child; losing a spouse; miscarriage; abortion (much though we celebrate it); serious accidents; sexual abuse.

These things happen to men too — but they happen more often to women and it's a fact that, for the most part, men and women react differently to traumatic events. A prison chaplain once told me that when male convicts are stressed they become aggressive. They lash out and feel better. Women hurt themselves.

If it's not altogether surprising that some women are weighed down by life, there is another statistic that does seem strange. The PTSD chart in this country has a spike. Our younger women suffer disproportionately and increasingly. The number of English girls between 16 and 24 who screened positive for PTSD trebled in the seven years from 2007 to 2014, and it's rising every year. It's sad but it's also curious. Life delivers shocks but surely these come with

increasing frequency as the years go by. Why so traumatised, so young?

The usual suspect is the internet. Teen girls seem trapped in a near-inescapable bubble of constant carping and comparing. It's also a fact that girls who use the most social media are the most likely to experience depression. But which came first: the blues or the ill-advised retreat online?

I hope for all our sakes that there are serious scientists doing serious studies on this. I hope they are also investigating another maybe more controversial theory that's been raised in recent years.

In 2004, George A. Bonanno, a professor of clinical psychology at Columbia University, wrote an interesting and optimistic paper on how we all cope with life's horrors. Bonanno is perhaps the world's foremost expert on the science of trauma and bereavement, but seems a jolly soul even so. His paper was called 'Loss, Trauma

What if we've created a 'grief work' trap, encouraging girls and boys to see ordinary blues as a problem?

and Human Resilience', subtitled: 'Have we underestimated the human capacity to thrive after extremely adverse events?' Bonanno's answer was yes, probably.

He looks at some of those same stats about the prevalence of PTSD, but his view is from a different angle. Bonanno agrees that a decent percentage of us, and especially women, require treatment for PTSD. But what's really incredible, he says, is how many of us just roll with the punches. He divides people into three main groups: the sufferers (the 10 per cent of women, let's say, and 6 per cent of men who really go under); the Teflon-coated Tiggers of the world and then the middle group of people, who stagger when life whacks them, display some of the symptoms of PTSD, then recover.

What is particularly interesting is Bonanno's suggestion that therapy, counselling or 'grief work' can interfere with the progress of those who would, if left alone, make a natural recovery. He writes: 'Whereas genuinely traumatised individuals were once doubted as malingerers, the pendulum has swung so far in the opposite direction that many prac-

titioners believe all individuals exposed to violent or life-threatening events should be offered and would benefit from some sort of intervention.' But, he says, 'growing evidence shows global applications of psychological debriefing are ineffective and can impede natural recovery processes'.

In the 14 years since Bonanno's paper, the mania for psychological debriefing and counselling has expanded across the West, propelled both by risk aversion and by genuine compassion. In the 1980s, state-sponsored counselling was just for medics who'd witnessed unimaginable horrors. By 9/11, Bonanno points out, it was considered an appropriate 'blanket intervention for all exposed individuals'. Come 2018, a wolf-whistle can be grounds for therapy. That stern age which decided Elizabeth had done her duty is long gone.

Twice last year I reported a bike stolen to the Met and though no thief was pursued, both times I was offered trauma counselling. Our western universities are ever keener on therapy for all. As this magazine has so often described, campus madness both in America and here has meant several works of great literature have been considered psychologically damaging.

I've thought all this is silly and paid it little mind. But what if our caring culture, the one that finally (and rightly) takes real PTSD seriously, is simultaneously undermining the natural resilience of kids? What if we've created a 'grief work' trap, encouraging girls and boys to see ordinary blues as a problem, urging them to seek help which then keeps them from recovery?

We hear more about the placebo effect every day. Just the thought that you've been given a cure is often enough to effect one. Perhaps there's a reverse placebo effect too. If we tell our young their ordinary, difficult emotions are disordered, they'll become so.

Bonanno's pendulum swings, but rarely settles. How can we ensure that the 10 per cent who need help are treated, while preserving enough old-fashioned grit to chivvy the others on? It's a terrible dilemma.

SPECTATOR.CO.UK/PODCAST

Mary Wakefield and Isabel Hardman on dealing with PTSD.

Political football

For Putin, the 2018 World Cup means global respect

OWEN MATTHEWS

Authoritarian regimes love grand international sporting events. There's something about the mass regimentation, the set-piece spectacle, the old-fashioned idea of nation states competing for glory that appeals to leaders who wish to show off the greatness of their country to the world. Berlin '36, Moscow '80, Sochi '14 — nothing says 'we're here, get used to it' better than a giant sporting jamboree.

The 2018 football World Cup doesn't offer quite the same degree of validation as an Olympic Games. But for Vladimir Putin, it's still a major opportunity to demonstrate not only Russia's new-found greatness but also its continued membership of the civilised world. For what Putin yearns for, above all, is respect, a place at the table of great nations, and recognition from the world that Russia is no longer a poor, dysfunctional collapsed empire but once again a superpower.

You might think that if gaining respect is Putin's aim, he has been looking for it in all the wrong places. Invading neighbouring countries, cheating at sports and undermining western democracies are hardly classic reputation-enhancers. But respect and respectability are different things. In the convoluted moral logic of Putin-world, breaking the rules is what every great nation does — from the US invasion of Iraq to Washington's supposed encouragement of democratic revolutions all over the former Soviet Union. And if the US can bend international law and remain respectable, Russia should be able to as well. The question is how to get away with it.

The World Cup, politically, is the Kremlin's big chance for attempting to re-set the world's bad opinion of Russia. The Kremlin's sincere hope is that the world will, some day soon, forget about all its recent crimes and get on with business as usual. Sergei Lavrov, during his meeting last month with Boris Johnson in Moscow, kept relentlessly pressing the point that it was time to 'move on', 'concentrate on the positives', 'rebuild our relationship' and various other diplomatic euphemisms for 'please let us off the hook'.

Putin has been very lucky with the World Cup. The fact that Russia is hosting the tournament at all is an accident of long-term scheduling. Russia was awarded the hosting rights in December 2010, back when the relatively liberal Dmitry Medvedev was president and there was every hope that the Putin

era was over. Between 2000 and 2008 Putin exiled and jailed over-mighty oligarchs and took over their TV stations; his troops made the separatist Georgian republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia Russian protectorates, laws were passed banning 'gay propaganda'. Russia was borderline wicked — but in the eyes of the world and of Fifa, not wicked enough to disqualify it from hosting such a prestigious event. By today's standards, 2010 was an innocent time — and even Russian liberals admitted that compared to Stalinist days, they were living under a 'vegetarian' regime rather than a carnivorous one.

What a difference seven years makes. Since his return to power in 2012, Putin annexed Crimea, backed an ongoing separatist rebellion in Eastern Ukraine that has killed more than 10,000 people, hatched a plot to conceal mass doping by Russian Olympic athletes, ratcheted up a propaganda and disinformation campaign intended to weaken and break apart western democracies, supported separatist movements across Europe from Catalonia to Scotland and backed right-wing parties from Hungary to Germany — before intervening to turn the tide of the Syrian civil war in favour of President Bashar al-Assad. If the selection for the World Cup were held today, there's little doubt Russia would be out of the running.

In the wake of the annexation of Crimea and the downing of a Malaysian Airlines plane by a Russian Buk missile launcher in 2014, there were calls to reassign the Cup. Fifa rejected them. The then Fifa president Sepp Blatter said that 'boycotting sport events or a policy of isolation or confrontation' doesn't work — and he was backed, naturally, by Russian sports minister and Fifa executive committee member Vitaly Mutko, who called the World Cup 'a force for good'.

Fifa, of course, is in many ways a kindred spirit to the Kremlin. Fifa was shown to be corrupt by a high-profile investigation by the US FBI in 2015 that resulted in the indictment of seven Fifa officials on suspicion of receiving \$150 million in bribes. When news of the misdeeds was made public, Fifa, like the Kremlin, blamed the press rather than the alleged culprits. In the wake of a 2010 *Sunday Times* and *Panorama* investigation into alleged payments to Fifa board members just before the selection of Russia as host of the 2018 World Cup, Blatter warned of the 'evils of the media' in a speech to the Fifa executive committee. As Blatter made clear, Fifa doesn't do boycotts for the sake of moral principles.

Putin has also been lucky that football is one of the very few remaining sports where Russian athletes haven't been seriously tainted by evidence of systematic doping, and are therefore still allowed to compete internationally. Two independent investigations by the International Olympics Committee uncovered overwhelming evidence that the Russian secret services organised a sophisticated system to cover up mass doping of Russian athletes at the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi. Among other shenanigans uncovered by the IOC, urine samples from Russian athletes were passed through a small hatchway in the testing lab into a secret room and untainted samples passed back in their place. The IOC established that more than 1,000 Russian athletes had used illegal performance-enhancing drugs, and stripped 51 of them of their Olympic medals. Russia itself was also denied the right to participate in next month's PyeongChang Winter Olympics — though individual Russian athletes can participate under a neutral flag. And Vitaly Mutko — now deputy prime minister and president of the Russian Football Union — has been banned for life from future Olympic Games for his role in the doping conspiracy.

Fifa seems to play by different rules. In November 2016, it fired Professor Jiri Dvorak, a distinguished doctor and neurologist who had worked on Fifa's medical, anti-doping and injury prevention programmes for 22 years after he began investigating doping in Russian football. According to the *Guardian*, Dvorak had contacted Professor Richard McLaren, author of the World Anti-Doping Agency's report into drugs at Sochi, to follow up on evidence that 11 Russian footballers were among the athletes who benefited from state-sponsored doping during the 2012 London Olympics. Fifa insisted that the paper's 'speculations around the departure of Prof Dvorak are completely baseless'.

To the Russians, the doping scandal, the Ukraine invasion and the US election hacking scandal should be seen as so much water under the bridge. To quote Sergei Lavrov, it's time to 'put the past behind us' and get on with enjoying the World Cup. Putin will surely make certain that it's a spectacle worthy of a great nation.



'He's one of the populist kids.'

LETTERS

Long lives and pension pots

Sir: Jon Moynihan is too optimistic about the prospects for further increasing life expectancy, and too gloomy about those of the pensions industry ('Falling Short', 6 January). The wondrous advancements of medical science have offered little to solve the most pervasive problem we now face: declining mental health. It seems unlikely that society will chose to invest endlessly in repairing bodies to extend lifespans, when the minds relating to those bodies have already been lost.

So the viability of pension providers is not as parlous as suggested. Indeed, many current fund deficits derive from the low investment yield environment that central bankers have engineered but which is not sustainable in the long term — the timeframe in which pension funds measure their liabilities. When more normal investment conditions return, the actuarial assumptions used in funding those liabilities (and they are always just assumptions) will greatly enhance the viability of pension provision.

The suggestion that the young can look forward to perhaps 50 years of drawing a pension looks more fanciful than the possibility that in a few years many pension funds will be reporting healthy surpluses.

*Clive Thursby
Hindhead, Surrey*

Robot nurses

Sir: Jon Moynihan is right to warn about the looming funding crisis of public-sector pensions. But one wonders why his optimism about future advances in longevity doesn't also lead him to expect widespread productivity gains from automation. Much of state employment today involves routine administrative tasks that could be taken over by robots in the foreseeable future. Even medical diagnostics and some police and nursing functions could be more efficiently performed by artificial intelligence. Not only will robots make us richer and healthier, but they won't require support in their old age.

*Diego Zuluaga
Head of Financial Services and Tech Policy,
Institute of Economic Affairs, London SW1*

Owen's powerful poetry

Sir: How depressing to read Nigel Jones's article about Wilfred Owen ('Anthem for groomed youth', 6 January). The title suggests sinister undertones that are unfounded, as Jones comments: 'All of this may have been entirely innocent.'

If he did indeed have 'sexual forays' in the East End, it is to be pitied that he could not behave in any other way in 1915. It is easy to make judgments in 2018; we live in a different world. His short life gave us some of the best war poetry ever written and his sexuality is irrelevant. We should remember the poem 'Spring Offensive' and think of the thousands of boys and men who 'there stood still/ To face the stark blank sky beyond the ridge,/ Knowing their feet had come to the end of the world.'

No one else could have written those beautiful, heartbreakin words.

*Jo Noble
Oxford*

Better buy gold

Sir: Lionel Shriver misses the obvious in her search for an asset whose 'value was not subjected to deliberate, systematic decay, whose supply was strictly limited, whose production was beyond the control of the state' ('Why cryptocurrencies are the answer', 6 January). Gold already ticks every box she requires for investing 'every last farthing' and has further benefits beyond her requirements. Cryptocurrencies



As our farmers know all too well: no pain, no grain.

They say nothing worth having comes easy. Unfortunately for our farmers that's true of the barley we use to brew our beers. We use a classic variety called Golden Promise. The biscuity, golden malt it produces is vital to Landlord's depth and delicate balance of flavour. It's also a type of barley that's notoriously hard to grow, and our exacting specification makes it even more difficult. Which makes it a costly ingredient and a real challenge even for experienced farmers. Luckily we can offer some liquid therapy.

All for that taste of Taylor's



will prove to be yet another example of where 'financial innovation' results in a tax on the ignorant. Like so many inventions before them, they offer no superior benefits to those offered by incumbent solutions.

*Freddie Lait
London SW1*

In praise of Parry

Sir: It was disappointing that Richard Bratby's article ('Hitting the high notes', 6 January) about classical music in 2018 made no mention of the centenary of Sir Hubert Parry, a great man of British music and a fine musician. There is a weekend in May, at Gloucester, devoted to Parry and his pupils, and (praise be) his work is featured at the Three Choirs festival at Hereford. Who knows, perhaps even the BBC will realise that Parry was a lot more than 'Jerusalem'.

*Stephen Lamley
Nottingham*

A shame about Toby

Sir: I read with real disappointment about Toby Young's resignation from the new OfS board. One shouldn't be surprised given the concerted public campaign to have him removed. These days I advise all colleagues to 'assume everyone will read everything you write and that everyone will repeat everything you say'. Sad, really — but only this can mitigate the risk of nasty future surprises. But who of us are faultless of thought? Toby Young is one of an increasingly rare breed who at least has the minerals to commit said thoughts to the written word. Long may he and his ilk continue. The OfS will be poorer for his absence and his challenging approach and will likely end up as yet another forum of nodding heads. Or OfNOD, perhaps.

*John Prior
Surrey*

The rise of subtitles

Sir: Mark Mason complains that subtitles are taking over the world ('Read 'em and weep', 6 January). Does it not occur to him that for people with hearing loss (which must include many readers of his article), subtitles are essential if they are to stay in touch with the world, be it watching TV and films, or indeed the online clips which are the main source of his complaints?

*Mike Peacock
Andover, Hants*

WRITE TO US

*The Spectator, 22 Old Queen Street,
London SW1H 9HP; letters@spectator.co.uk*

Wolff told us the US awaited a president who could cast a spell on markets: now it has one



I once commissioned Michael Wolff — currently the world's most talked-about journalist as the author of the White House exposé *Fire and Fury* — to write for *The Spectator*. It was just before the 2004 presidential election in which Republican incumbent George W. Bush looked set to see off the Democrat challenger John Kerry, and I invited Wolff to tell us the implications for the stock market. His thesis was that the Democrats had become 'the party of wealth and Wall Street' while the Republicans had become 'non-players', Bush having turned his back on business to be 'a God-squad cheerleader'. America was waiting in vain for a president who could 'cast a spell of optimism over consumers and markets'.

Not even a mind as allegedly inventive as Wolff's might have imagined that the president who would one day claim credit for a one-third rise in the Dow Jones index during his first year in office would be Donald Trump. 'Six trillion dollars in value created' boasted the tweet — which also claimed incorrectly that recent weeks has seen the 'record fastest 1,000-point move in history'.

In fact a comparable spike occurred at the height of the 1999 dotcom boom and I'm reminded of a conversation with a grand old Republican lawyer during Bill Clinton's impeachment hearings, a year before that boom turned to bust. 'Do you think the President's behaviour has shamed your country?' I asked. The answer came with a shrug: 'The stock market's doing just fine.'

Down on the farm

The farming community was hoping, until a few days ago, that Michael Gove might be moved to pastures new in the reshuffle that hardly happened on Monday. One Yorkshire neighbour of mine with a big muck-spreader used to refer to the secretary of state for environment, food and rural affairs as 'the Grim Reaper'. But in Gove's speech to the Oxford Farming Conference last week, he seems to have pulled off the political trick of winning headlines about 'deliver-

ing a Green Brexit' that pleased the urban middle classes but might previously have had farmers reaching for their pitchforks — while in fact reassuring most of them that, contrary to previous indications, he has their interests at heart and understands the need to cut red tape, promote high standards and reward conservation in a balanced way.

Welcome news was that UK farm subsidies of £3 billion from Brussels will be matched until 2022, but in future will no longer be paid in proportion to size — a system that absurdly favours wealthy landowners such as the Duke of Westminster, Sir James Dyson and the racehorse breeder Prince Khalid bin Abdullah al Saud, without encouraging better practice. In a sector where the average farm is just 160 acres, few will object to that shift. More worrying was Gove's talk of rewarding 'public goods', which many farmers fear means wider public access to their land as well as more acceptable objectives to do with bird and wildflower diversity. But Gove also talked about 'supporting innovation, improving productivity [and] training a new generation of entrepreneurial young farmers' — which is what smart farmers themselves care about most.

These days, farming is a highly scientific business that is gradually shifting from chemistry to biology in its quest for better results and is replete with acronyms such as 'YEN' — a pioneering crop yield enhancement network run by Adas, the Agricultural Development & Advisory Service. But progressive farmers are frustrated by public and political ignorance, and health scares such as the row over glyphosate, the key ingredient in the weedkiller Roundup, which the World Health Organisation declared 'probably carcinogenic' though several other reputable agencies disagreed. Gove, to his credit, was quick to take the right side of that argument: my neighbour also calls him 'our new glyphosate champion'. Out of place as he may look in his green wellies in farm-visit photo ops, the minister can at least be confident he won't get sprayed with FYM (that's farmyard manure).

Man of parts

I asked Peter Sutherland — who I greatly admired and who died last weekend — which of his achievements made him most proud. Ireland's most passionate pro-European was chairman at the time of BP and Goldman Sachs International but said little about either and (more understandably) nothing about his directorship of RBS. Instead he listed his leading roles in the creation of the World Trade Organisation and Europe's Erasmus student exchange scheme, his record as a youthful attorney general of Ireland, and his continuing work as UN special representative on migration. He told me he had never aspired to a business career and did not think he would have prospered if he had chosen that path as a young man, rather than the Dublin bar. Nevertheless he had relished the challenges of BP, which included fierce arm-wrestling with the Russian oligarchs who were the oil giant's joint venture partners.

He was a humanitarian and an international negotiator first, a slightly reluctant corporate titan second. I suspect the least congenial milieu in his portfolio was the amoral money machine that is Goldman Sachs; so it's ironic that his belated induction into the investment bank's partnership brought him a nine-digit personal fortune.

Better than a tattoo

Here's the best entry so far in last week's competition for the most articulate justification, 100 words max, for following the example of the banker's daughter who is a buyer of Bitcoin over the advice of her father, JPMorgan Chase chairman Jamie Dimon, that all Bitcoin investors are 'stupid'. It comes from Bernard Kerrison: 'Dimon's daughter is right because annoying your father is what daughters do, while buying Bitcoin doesn't leave lasting damage like a tattoo and is much cheaper than taking up with an unsuitable young man.' More entries, please, to martin@spectator.co.uk.

BOOKS & ARTS

Emily Hill is sending her ex-lover's T-shirt to join the other tragic tat in The Museum of Broken Relationships

Tim Stanley reckons that America's best hope is to find another FDR

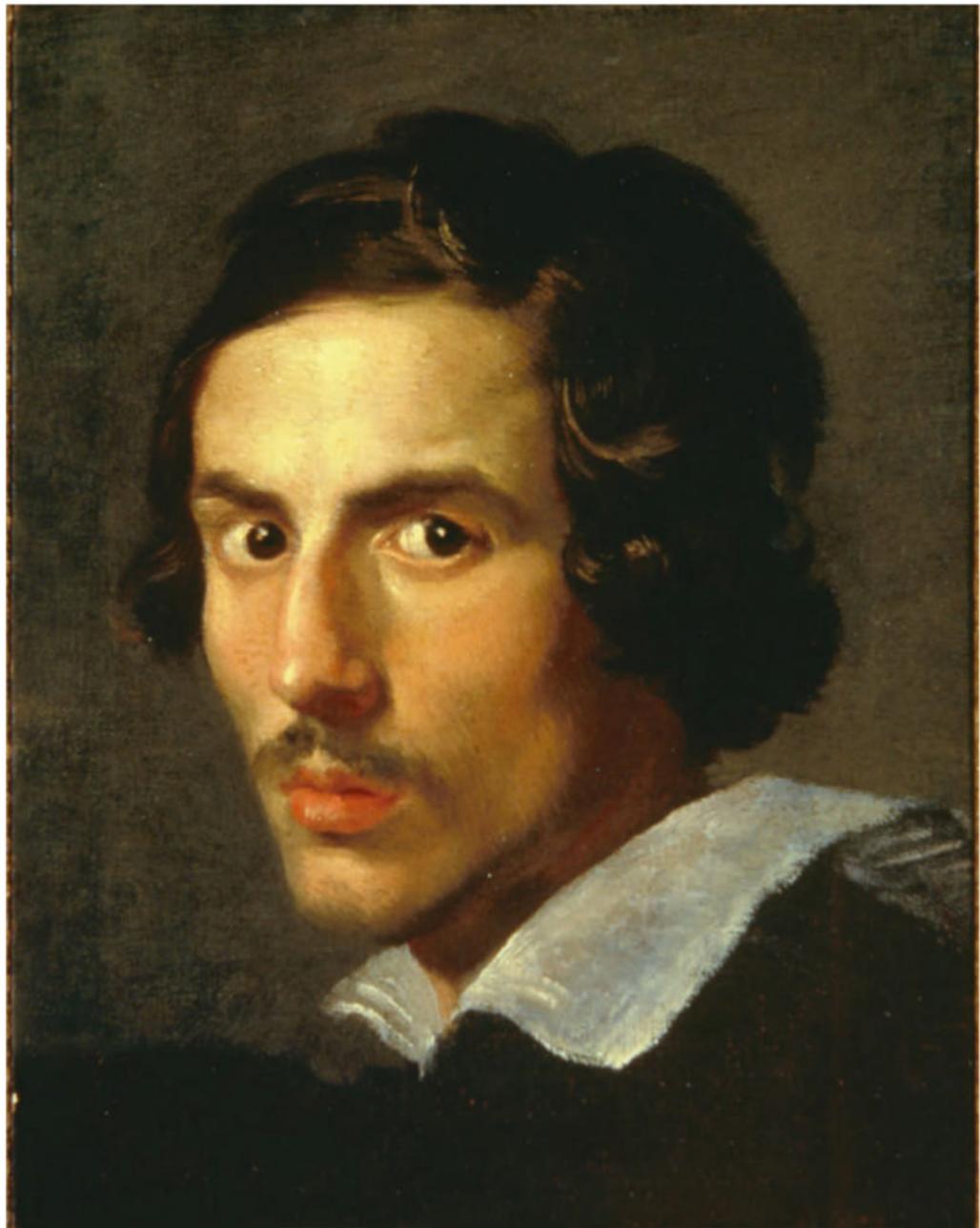
Kate Womersley celebrates the gentle Quaker Joseph Lister, who transformed surgery from butchery to a healing art

Andrew Roberts takes a look at Churchills on film and TV – from Nazi caricatures to Gary Oldman

Kate Chisholm has a solution to the BBC pay scandal: downgrade the celebrity presenters

James Walton suggests that a genuinely controversial TV drama would be an all-white, all-male one

'Self-Portrait as a Young Man', 1623, by Gian Lorenzo Bernini
Martin Gayford – p46



BOOKS

The greatest journeys ever made

William Bligh's was not the only astonishing open-boat voyage in the Pacific in the late 18th century. There were others just as desperate, says *Nicholas Shakespeare*

Paradise in Chains: The Bounty Mutiny and the Founding of Australia

by Diana Preston

Bloomsbury, £25, pp. 333

Many believed in Australia for 1,000 years before its discovery. There had to be a commensurate weight — somewhere Down Under — to counter the northern land mass; an 'unknown Southland' which was crucial to maintaining the balance of the world. To confuse matters, this theoretical continent was dubbed for a while Australia del Espíritu Santo — in honour of the House of Austria.

A socially awkward Lincolnshireman, Matthew Flinders, in 1804, was the originator of Australia as the name for what had for centuries been called New Holland, but two French sailors, an aristocratic cartographer, Louis Freycinet, and a manipulative, one-eyed anthropologist, François Péron, showed for the first time the continent's actual shape.

From the late 1700s, galvanised by the loss of their American colonies, the French dispatched seven expeditions in 30 years to seek a huge landmass known as Gonneville Land, named after a French sailor blown off course in 1503. None of these expeditions had marvellous outcomes for their commanders. Marion was eaten by Maoris, Kerguelen convicted of fraud, D'Entrecasteaux died of scurvy, while the most famous, La Pérouse, vanished without trace.

Napoleon — who had volunteered for La Pérouse's expedition, but was rejected — kept alive French hopes of a replacement L'Amérique. In 1801, he authorised a scientific expedition captained by Nicolas Baudin, an aloof, dry-witted botanist, to 'study the inhabitants, animals and natural products of the countries in which he will land'. A popular belief is that Baudin's instructions included a 'secret order' to establish a French settlement in Van Diemen's Land,

discovered by the Dutch explorer Abel Tasman in 1642, and to claim the island (now Tasmania) before the English — and then to claim the western half of the nearby continent where England had raised her flag; so far, only over New South Wales.

Why else would large areas on charts mapped by Freycinet and Péron, two of Baudin's officers, be marked 'Terre Napoléon'? Had Baudin, in March 1802, not lost contact with his short-sighted hydrographer Charles-Pierre Boulanger off the Freycinet Peninsula (where I write this) and spent the next two months searching for him, then the French might have beaten Flinders to it and charted the mainland all the way to Spencer Gulf.

As it was, France's achievement in becoming the first nation to map Australia's coastline was ignored: when Péron's *Atlas* at last appeared in 1811, three years before Flin-

In 1791, life in Botany Bay was so harsh for convicts that escape into the unknown was the lesser of two evils

ders's *Voyage to Terra Australis*, it aroused scant interest. By then, the baptismal melodramas which Diana Preston explores in *Paradise in Chains* had played themselves out.

The story about the founding of Australia has been well told before, not least by Thomas Keneally in *Commonwealth of Thieves* and by Robert Hughes in *The Fatal Shore*. What Preston brings to it in the absence of a French connection is an 18th-century willingness to follow in the wake of her leading English characters — a journey that takes her to Tahiti and Pitcairn Island, if not to Kupang in Timor, which has grounds to be considered the capital of her narrative as much as Sydney Cove.

In the space of two years, Kupang's local population watched sail into their harbour: on 14 June 1789, William Bligh and 17 sur-



vivors of the *Bounty*, after travelling 47 days and 3,600 miles in an open 23-foot boat; on 5 June 1791, William and Mary Bryant, their two children, plus seven other escaped convicts from Sydney Cove, after sailing 69 days and 3,254 miles in Governor Phillip's stolen cutter; on 15 September 1791, Captain Edward Edwards with survivors of the shipwrecked *Pandora*, plus ten captured mutineers of the *Bounty*, after sailing 1,200 miles from the Great Barrier Reef. Excited to retell these open-boat journeys, which 'certainly rank among the greatest such journeys ever made', Preston has a challenge to keep her feet on several diverging rafts, and lash them together into a single, focused narrative.

She is right to restore Tahiti to its position as the fertile launch pad for Australia. She gives special prominence to the cantankerous Bligh and his suave mentor, the wealthy botanist Sir Joseph Banks, as characters who left their lasting thumbprints on these colonies, as did Cortes and Pizarro in Latin America. The Tahitian islands 'discovered' by the English in 1767, and visited two years later by James Cook, were described by Banks, who shared Cook's cabin on the *Endeavour*, as 'the truest picture of an arca... If we quarrelled with those Indians we should not agree with angels!' A French



Bligh and crew are set adrift from the Bounty, in a painting by Robert Dodd

botanist, Philibert Commerson, judged the Tahitians 'free of any vice and prejudice'; further, their stunningly alluring women were 'the sisters of the utterly naked Graces', for whom 'the action of creating a fellow human being is a religious one'. The Tahitians reciprocated with a corresponding passion for anything made of iron. The price of a virgin being 'three nails and a knife', many a pock-marked, toothless sailor was soon extracting nails from his ship's hull to reward sexual favours. Nor did the natives simply covet metal objects. An embarrassed Banks had to return aboard scantly clad in Tahitian cloth after his clothes were stolen while he was *in flagrante delicto* at the bottom of a canoe with a Tahitian girl.

On his return home, the much-affected Banks immediately 'ended his engagement to the wealthy heiress Harriet Blosset'. More significantly, he convinced the Admiralty to send back to Tahiti the five-foot, blue-eyed, only son of a Cornish customs official, William Bligh, 'to bring the breadfruit plant' with which, Banks argued, England could feed her starving slaves in the West Indies — following the loss of her own American colonies. Tahitian breadfruit was, in Preston's words, 'a kind of manna from heaven as freely available as the island's beautiful women, only waiting to be plucked from the tree'.

In another significant decision, Banks was responsible for promoting Botany Bay in New South Wales as a destination for English convicts, now that American ports were denied them. The irony here: Banks's twin project in Botany Bay would need Tahitian breadfruit a lot more than England's Caribbean cane fields.

If Tahiti was a Utopia, then Sydney Cove was its opposite. 'In the whole world there is not a worse country,' lamented Major Robert Ross, commander of the marines sent to guard the first batch of 759 convicts, most of them petty thieves. Instead of a landscape with a climate like Toulouse, as Banks had promised, with plenty of fish and fresh water, and timorous natives, the First Fleet had landed in unforgiving, arid, stunted scrub with no pliant women, no food, and hostile locals who, accorded to Lieutenant Philip Gidley King, 'desired us to be gone'.

Within two years the situation had grown so critical that Mary Bryant, a convicted highwaywoman, decided to escape with her family: 'an open boat into the unknown was the lesser of two evils'. Arrested in Kupang and taken back to London, she and her four surviving companions declared they 'would sooner suffer death than return to Botany Bay'.

That the fragile young colony did not revolt was due to its fair-minded first governor, Arthur Phillip. In Tahiti, by contrast, Bligh's narcissistic and volatile character, more than the allure of young women, sparked Fletcher Christian's 'unpremeditated' mutiny.

Preston enjoys reminding us that this was not the last mutiny provoked by Bligh. In 1806 — again at Banks's behest — Bligh arrived in Sydney Cove as the colony's new governor. The catalyst this time was an appalling ancestor of mine, a profiteering officer in the New South Wales ('Rum') Corps called Anthony Fenn Kemp, who steadfastly resisted Bligh's attempts to clean up the corruption in which Bligh himself participated. 'What do you think he told me?' Kemp railed. 'Yes! Told the oldest merchant in the colony — that he came here to protect the poor. That is not the Governor WE want!!!' At 6.30 p.m. on 26 January 1808, the 20th anniversary of Australia's foundation, Kemp marched up the drive at the head of the Rum Corps, sword drawn, into Government House. After a couple of hours, Bligh was discovered in a room upstairs. One of Kemp's soldiers noticed a bedcover twitching, prodded it with his musket and struck a boot. There was Bligh, covered in spider-webs and with his shirt hanging out.

If the connections that Preston makes between her different narratives seem at times as arbitrary as the dispensation of English justice during this supposed Age of Enlightenment, then it does not detract from the skill with which she reweaves a familiar story. Having doggedly followed their trails on the page as well as on foot, she is well placed to judge the destruction wrought by her characters, best summarised by the *Pandora*'s surgeon George Hamilton after drawing anchor in Tahiti. 'Happy would it have been if these people had never been visited by Europeans.'



Has Ann Quin's time come at last?

Short and sharp

Jonathan Coe

The Unmapped Country: Stories and Fragments

by Ann Quin, edited by Jennifer Hodgson
And Other Stories, £10, pp. 192

Like *A Fiery Elephant*, my biography of the experimental novelist B.S. Johnson, contains one particularly careless sentence: the one where I described Johnson as 'Britain's one-man literary avant-garde of the 1960s'. It was a silly thing to write, partly because it wasn't true, but also because it was easily the most quotable line in the book and so every journalist and reviewer was bound to pick it up and repeat it. And so it proved.

But Johnson was not Britain's one-man literary avant-garde. The 1960s saw a significant flowering of what we might (for shorthand) call experimental writing in this country. They saw the emergence of writers such as Nicholas Mosley, Christine Brooke-Rose, Brigid Brophy and Robert Nye, while around Johnson himself clustered a small group of like-minded novelists, bound together by prickly friendship and, if not a shared aesthetic exactly, then at least a shared opposition to what they saw as the prevailing aesthetic (neo-Victorian

realism). These writers included Alan Burns, Eva Figes and Ann Quin.

Quin was born in Brighton in 1936, and died in 1973, walking out to sea off Brighton beach in an act which shockingly prefigured Johnson's own suicide a few weeks later. In her short writing life she produced four unconventional novels — *Three, Passages, Tripticks* and, perhaps most famously, her debut *Berg*, published in 1964 and filmed in the late 1980s as *Killing Dad*. She has never been widely read, but Stewart Home has written that 'despite ongoing rumours of a B.S. Johnson revival, I feel our attention could be more usefully directed towards Ann Quin'; and the appearance of this collection of short prose — some of it previously unpublished — might mark the beginning of her rise to a new eminence.

Most of the 1960s British experimentalists were united, very loosely, by political as well as aesthetic dissatisfactions. Politically, they were in revolt against the hierarchies of the British literary and publishing establishments, which were even posher and more Oxbridge-dominated than they are today, if such a thing is possible. Of course this was also, ironically, the decade in which working-class writers such as David Storey, Margaret Forster and Alan Sillitoe became famous, but the experimentalists could not cheer on these pioneers because

they considered their books too traditional. To be experimental, after all, required you to be in revolt against aesthetic hierarchies as well. Most of the writers in Quin's circle and beyond were interested, above all, in narrative fragmentation: adapting William Burroughs's cut-up techniques and the radical dislocations of the *nouveau roman* in order to avoid the bourgeois compromises of plot, tidy narrative resolution and character development.

Therefore, while Jennifer Hodgson's new collection of Quin's prose describes itself as 'Stories and Fragments', even the longest stories here are themselves fragmentary. A characteristic Quin paragraph will consist of short sentences, often verbless, using the full stop the way a conventional writer might use a comma; perceptions will be rendered in discrete, brief phrases, cutting rapidly from one image to another:

Along the Front. Deserted. Long sloping pavements. Carefully avoiding the puddles. She took her shoes off and ran. Laughing. On to the beach. Down to the water's edge. She heard him panting. Crunching over the pebbles. Her hair over her eyes. She did not sweep away. Lights of the town distant. The sky uplifted from the heaving mass of darkness. That was the sea. Sound of sea. Sounds of other seas. Other days. Spent in other places. Under foreign skies.

This is from 'A Double Room', the story of an adulterous seaside affair, banal enough in its substance but rendered distinctive by the manner of its telling. It's one of the more straightforward pieces in a very diverse collection, which ranges from autobiographical essays (one about Quin's schooldays, another — short, pithy and mordant — called 'One Day in the Life of a Writer') to a 50-page extract from her final, unfinished novel, born of Quin's 'frequent and devastating bouts of mental illness': a work, in Hodgson's words, about 'the horrors of "going sane"'.

Quin's friend and supporter Alan Burns once reminisced about the time she took part in an ICA event in the 1960s and

she did her Quin thing, that is to say she came onto the stage and she just sat and looked at people, she wouldn't say a goddamn word! She just stared, she either implied or she actually stated that ... we can communicate more in silence than with someone actually putting the words across.

That militant refusal to compromise also flavours her writing: you either take her on her own terms, or not at all. Quin is challenging, for sure, but the recent popular embrace of Deborah Levy and Eimear McBride (both writers who, to my mind, show an affinity with Ann Quin, if not her direct influence) suggests that there is a growing readership out there with a taste for something richer and stranger than the satisfactions of mainstream fiction. It could be that Ann Quin's time has come at last.



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BRIDGEMAN IMAGES

The execution of mutineers by the Bengal Horse Artillery, in a painting by Orlando Norie

Cannon law

A.S.H. Smyth

The Skull of Alum Bheg: The Life and Death of a Rebel of 1857

by Kim A. Wagner
Hurst, £25, pp. 320

Many and various are the things one finds in Kentish pubs (I'm told); but few could top the sepoy's skull discovered at The Lord Clyde, Walmer, complete with brief biography:

Skull of havildar 'Alum Bheg', 46th Regt. Bengal N. Infantry... blown away from a gun.

From this grisly starting point, Kim Wagner, lecturer in British imperial history at Queen Mary University of London, narrates how, in the swelter of mid-1857, following outbreaks throughout British India, native Bengal Army units at Sialkot mutinied, killing officers and civilians and looting the cantonment, and then set out for Delhi to join Bahadur Shah, the briefly-minted 'Emperor of India'.

They didn't make it. All but wiped out by 'Nikal Seyn' Nicholson's moving column, the survivors fled into the Himalayas. A year later they were dragged back to Sialkot and executed, havildar Bheg among them. His head was picked up, 'defleshed' and brought home to Dublin by a captain of the 7th Dragoon Guards — 'the ultimate proof', as Wagner deems it, 'of colonial power'.

Alive, it must be said, Alum Bheg does not feature too prominently. An 'archival absence' about him before his execution

surely means he was not a 'principal leader in the mutiny', as the note appended to his skull suggests. By and large it would appear that he died as proxy for a more notorious mutineer, the cartoonish former flogger of the district court.

But how the havildar (or sergeant) went from loyal servant of John Company to mutineer gives scope for looking at the wider mutiny. Indian conceptions of armed service proved incompatible with the East India Company's. The sepoys — largely Hindustanis, in the Punjab which they'd recently helped to add to British territory — saw themselves as kingmakers, a caste-

Hysterical reports of rape, baby-murdering and mutilation sealed the fate of all the Indian troops

like group unto themselves, with privileges to uphold and a strict, contractual attitude towards the 'military labour market'. The Company, though, was now the last employer standing, and had a different idea of their obligations.

Religion, obviously, played its part. A fatal air hung over the centenary of British dominance in the subcontinent. The reports of fat-smeared cartridges were, infamously, everywhere. And though the EIC officially frowned on evangelism, Sialkot was 'overrun by zealous Christians'. For their part, the sepoys — Hindu, Muslim or other — were quick to turn their scruples into larger problems.

Geography did not help, either. At a 'border post at the end of a road leading nowhere' (now in Pakistan), with the cables

cut and the mail prohibited, the Sialkot forces were the last to mutiny — victims, essentially, of a vicious spiral of distrust, fear and professional outrage. The British thought they saw conspiracy everywhere; the sepoys were terrified of their artillery being turned against them.

In all, at Sialkot, events were rather minor — seven British deaths, including one woman and one baby. But they epitomised the general pattern of the 'Uprising' (Wagner's preferred term), not least because hysterical reports of 'violation', baby-murdering and mutilation poured fuel on the retributive colonial fire, 'sealing the fate of all the Indian troops', however culpable.

In his telling of the life, death and after-life of Alum Bheg, Wagner is at home with terms like 'orientalising', 'fetishised' and 'subaltern prosopography'. But the violence of 1857 was mutiny, not (his quotes) 'Mutiny'; an NCO is not 'an officer', particularly here; and Bheg, however small a role he played at Sialkot, wasn't 'innocent'. Nor do I accept Wagner's blithe dismissal of the idea that rebel violence might have played a part in brutalising the British soldiery.

Nonetheless, Nicholson's 'exemplary' gory punishments were denounced by British contemporaries, and in aiming the judicial cannonade at native audiences, the hell-mouth of the cannon reignited the same cultural-religious fears that had sparked the whole damn business in the first place.

As one lieutenant noted sadly in his diary: 'Such cruelties must tell against us in the long run.'

Sunlit days and starry nights

Boyd Tonkin

**Writer's Luck:
A Memoir, 1976–1991**
by David Lodge
Harvill Secker, £25, pp. 387

In 1990, the BBC's adaptation of David Lodge's culture-clash novel *Nice Work* won an award at a glitzy soirée in London. At the same time, his debut stage play *The Writing Game* opened at the Birmingham Rep. Malcolm Bradbury, his old friend and partner on the twin tracks of literary academia and serio-comic fiction, had come to Birmingham to stay and see the show. After a starry night in the West End, and 'a brief whirl around the dance floor', Lodge sped back home. He arrived at 3.30 a.m., but found that his wife Mary 'had accidentally locked me out, and I had to throw gravel up at our bedroom window from the back garden to wake her without disturbing the Bradburys'. Mr Pooter may have joined the A-list, but mishaps and pratfalls still dog his every step.

Lodge's 15 novels reveal a sly and droll ventriloquist who knows exactly how to fix a mood or modify a key through the timbre of a storyteller's voice. In this second volume of memoirs, the contrast between his mid-career procession of triumphs, adventures and accolades and the deadpan, humdrum delivery is wholly conscious and controlled. Who knew, for instance, that this proud adoptive Brummie had a long-standing link with Hawaii — the location of his *Paradise News* — after his Auntie Eileen settled there? Although research for that novel involved a dash from the museum in Waikiki straight to a bar 'with topless go-go girls on a catwalk', Lodge tends to make his Pacific excursions to care for Eileen sound like trips to Sutton Coldfield. Even a tour of Pearl Harbor turns out to be merely 'extremely interesting, though not very relevant to my novel'.

Self-effacing, borderline pedestrian, this *Diary of a Somebody* tone does a double job. First, it takes the edge of envy off a chronicle of middle-aged success that saw Lucky David slip with frictionless aplomb away from his cosy berth at the University of Birmingham into a freelance career. During this vanished era, both cash and kudos might await an ideas-rich satirist and social comedian of Lodge's calibre: 'I happened to hit my stride as a novelist when the going was good for literary fiction.' Here, the earnest, upwardly mobile South London Catholic we met in the first volume, *Quite a Good Time to be Born*, segues from learned studies of modernism and structuralism to the Booker shortlist (twice), healthy advances, round-the-world tours and

big-budget TV serials. We glimpse him, en route by helicopter to Monte Carlo, 'skimming the waves in a rather thrilling way'. That final phrase stamps the narrator of *Writer's Luck* as a deftly crafted character to match any in *Changing Places* or *Small World*. So does his response to footage of his appearance, clad in a fawn corduroy suit from Austin Reed, and a Beatles hairstyle, on a book-chat programme hosted by Robert Robinson. In the discussion, 'I spoke rather well, I think'.

False modesty or not, Lodge's low-key narration has another role. It shifts the focus from his serene-sounding progress through a gilded age of conference globe-trotting and literary hype onto the conditions that underlay these 'buoyant times'. Without ever dropping his academic hat, he swapped gown for town during a brief window of rich opportunity. Changes in education, publishing and bookselling nurtured a hunger for the intelligent entertainment that his novels so smartly met. His own journey spotlights the social history of his genera-

tion, whether in the incremental loss of faith that estranged him from the church ('I was not innately spiritual') or his hawk-eyed scrutiny of the sexual revolution — always, he assures us, as 'a war correspondent, not a participant'. He does admit to a taste for naked mixed saunas and nude swimming with 'the water coursing unimpeded round your loins'. Typically, though, he acquired his saucy sauna habit at the Center Parcs camps where the search for 'safe, friendly and predictable' holidays with his Down's Syndrome son Chris led him.

The quest to make Chris happy and secure casts the odd shadow over these sunlit uplands. His mother's illness and death engender passing gloom, although when he kisses Mum's forehead, 'cold and unyielding as marble', we learn that 'I did not weep. I never do'. Lodge glances at his own episodes of stress-related 'anxiety and depression', briskly quelled by yoga and counselling. His closest brush with despair or revelation arises from a rash surfeit of long-haul flights that culminates in an 'epiphany' on the tarmac of

Postern

Anything can snag unexpectedly
like this picture of an empty doorway
framed by splitting lattice climbing ivy
and a half-panel of tongue-and groove
unvarnished weather-hammered oak
held open to let us out or in.

Dead leaves like the years behind
blow over the floor where we stand
looking through to a grey-gold
mist over rolling hills
the kind of world
where she felt at home.

Inside you can almost smell
the rotting deck-chairs creosote
crumbling leather frayed rope dust.
You can find anything in here. Look
once-vital objects turning like us all
to junk and rust.

What am I thinking of? Oh yes —
the abandoned summerhouse
below and out of sight of the back lawn
in the garden where she grew up.
This is my mind telling me
that's where she's gone.

— Ruth Padel

a Canadian airport. Artfully, enjoyably, he sidelines the inner life in favour of a shrewd and drily comic testimony from a lost epoch of plenty. Younger writers in these less blessed times may pore over it with the stupefied wonder of Dark Age peasants uncovering a floor mosaic of feasts and revels amid the ruins of a Roman villa.

A girl with green eyes

Emily Hill

Jealousy: A Forbidden Passion

by Giulia Sissa

Polity, £17.99, pp. 303

Revenge: A Short Enquiry into Retribution

by Stephen Fineman

Reaktion, £14.99, pp. 152

The Museum of Broken Relationships: Modern Love in 203 Everyday Objects

by Olinka Vistica

Weidenfeld, £16.99, pp. 222

I loved a man. But our affair was nasty, brutish and short. Copious weeping was my untart retort. All that's left of him is a stained T-shirt. I must rid my mind of him now. That's long overdue. But how? These three books seem to present three answers. I've been wonkily underlining whole paragraphs and brooding over what to do.

Nowadays, if you admit to being heartbroken after the fact you're treated as a malingerer. So I very much appreciated Giulia Sissa's *Jealousy: A Forbidden Passion* — a scholarly defence of indulging your violent fury. In the age of Tinder, your next paramour is but a thumb-swipe away, so the attitude is: 'They don't love you. Why would you care? It's all in your head. It's all in your past. It's always your problem. Enough!' I agree with Sissa. We women 'do not like being treated like an interchangeable, meaningless, replaceable presence', and it's OK to feel green about it.

But I am confused by how much emphasis she places on Medea, who, according to myth, helped Jason slay the Minotaur, only to be abandoned by the ungrateful wretch when he took a fancy to another woman. In response, Medea slaughtered all their children. This might signify much for what Sissa calls our 'erotic dignity'; but when seeking to prove that jealousy is not 'the most obscene emotion of all', Medea is an odd choice of heroine.

So I dispensed with the idea of becoming homicidally jealous and turned instead to Stephen Fineman's *Revenge: A Short Enquiry into Retribution*, in which he argues, very persuasively, that revenge is a dish we really should serve — whether cold, hot or

as a lukewarm canapé. 'Our compulsion to avenge a wrongdoing is among the most primal of human urges,' he explains. 'Getting even shows there is a price to pay.'

I raced through this book, cackling — and relishing in particular the pages pointing out how, throughout history, and still in some areas of the world, mine is the sex that has been persistently maltreated and oppressed and that it's jolly nice finally to be getting our own back. Fineman points out that wartime rapes have barely been prosecuted and refers to honour killings today. I suspect he is itching to write a fresh chapter on how Harvey Weinstein finally got his just deserts thanks to the #metoo brigade.

Fineman seems quite a fan of vigilante justice — as long as the target is indisputably guilty. He doesn't understand why we should get screwed over again and again without doing anything about it. 'Turning the other cheek,' he observes, 'is simply an invitation to be slapped again.' He gives voice to all the waiters who avow they are not 'robots to respond to finger clicks' and lament of their customers: 'I wouldn't treat a dog, the way they treat us.'

He adds: 'Minor acts of sabotage can bring relief from intrinsically alienating or monotonous work.' I have known that pleasure. So I adored, above all, Fineman's air hostesses,

who break wind in the direction of obnoxious passengers, redirect all their luggage to, say, Tokyo, and when asked by a man to smile, say they'll smile if he will too. When he does, they shoot back: 'Now freeze and hold that for 15 hours.' The customer is not always right. When he's vile he should get his comeuppance.

But not all revenge is quite so righteous. Sometimes it's just vicariously amusing. 'Never wrong a writer,' Fineman advises. 'They get their revenge in print.' (A statement that may send a shiver down my true love's spine.) Take Norman Mailer, who so despised his third wife, Jeanne Campbell, he had her double strangled and thrown off a tenth-floor balcony in *An American Dream*. Campbell dubbed this light fictionalisation of their unhappiness together 'the hate book of all time'.

'Mailer's venom is palpable,' Fineman concludes. 'But it is trounced by Ernest Hemingway.' When Papa's third wife, Martha Gellhorn, walked out (wondering why she should 'be a footnote to somebody else's life') he retaliated by writing a poem to her vagina, likening 'said organ to the crumpled neck of an old hot-water bottle'. Then, in a short story called 'It was Very Cold in England', a Hemingway-like character compares the sexual performance of a Gellhorn-like character to a washed-up mine that had failed to detonate'.

Tempting as it would be to assassinate my man in print, I don't want to come off looking as petty as all that. So I turned to *The Museum of Broken Relationships* which claims to sum up 'modern love in 203 everyday objects'. The museum was founded in Croatia by two ex-lovers who wanted to memorialise their former passion for one another, and I found the accompanying book very affecting. I don't want to fall in love again if this is how it always has to end.

Each page consists of a photograph of an item sent to the museum together with a note explaining what it symbolises to the one who posted it. Each tale is different. And yet all are curiously the same — bleak and stark and heart-mashing. It's like a cheerfully coloured catalogue of suicide, divorce and venereal disease.

At times, there's nothing to do but laugh: at the 'can of love incense' (explanation: 'didn't work'); at the 'sweatshirt with a smiley face on the front and the reverse on the back':

The angry face tells me that he went to a South American transgender prostitute on Vesterbro and paid 800 Danish Kroner for a blow job on Christmas Eve. 'Now we have gonorrhoea,' the face says.

But best by far was the note accompanying the twin silicone jellies salvaged from a reversed boob job. ('My ex had convinced me to get breast implants... at the time I hadn't had enough therapy to tell him to go f*** himself!')

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I was persuaded. My love may sleep peacefully in his bed. I'll just ship what's left of him to Zagreb. There his T-shirt can join all the other tragic tat. A monument to our nothingness. A promise to forget.

Father of the nation

Tim Stanley

Franklin D. Roosevelt: A Life

by Robert Dallek

Allen Lane, £30, pp. 704

Franklin D. Roosevelt isn't as popular as he once was. When Barack Obama won the 2008 election, he let it be known that he was reading a book about FDR, and tumbleweed blew through the newsrooms. Which is odd because for many decades FDR was every bit the model liberal as Ronald Reagan was the model conservative. Roosevelt was credited with ending the Great Depression, laying the foundations of a welfare state and leading America through the second world war — achievements for which he was rewarded with not one, not two but four election victories. And he did all of this despite being an elitist East Coaster with a wife who was very probably a lesbian. So cool was the marriage of Franklin and Eleanor, so European, that when Eleanor was asked what she thought of one of her husband's election victories, she replied: 'What difference does it make to me?'

Robert Dallek's superb book explores how they got away with it. Roosevelt was helped somewhat by the era he lived in. Journalists were more willing to pretend he hadn't been left crippled by a paralytic illness — and the public had no need to know that Eleanor didn't always spend Christmas with her husband. But the idea that the 1930s was a more genteel age in which it was far easier to govern is bull. Congress was divided not only by party but by region and ideology — and both sides liked to throw around labels like 'communist' or 'fascist'. General Douglas MacArthur applauded a Republican congressman who said that Roosevelt was a proto-monarch, determined to 'destroy the rights of the common people'. In 1938, a citizen from Atlanta wrote to FDR: 'Try dipping your head in a pail of water three times and just bring it out twice. Then the country will really recover.'

Roosevelt made mistakes. To overcome constitutional resistance, he tried and failed to pack the Supreme Court. He was too slow to help Germany's Jews. His neutrality in the Spanish Civil War probably helped Franco's fascists win. He was obviously too distracted by ill-health to negotiate with Stalin. And he shared the common mistaken belief that the American South could be left alone to evolve towards black



GETTY IMAGES

civil rights. From the present perspective — when liberalism has become so much about identity politics, particularly race — that looks not only naive but a serious blemish on any record.

Well, perhaps the present asks too much. The scale of conservative opposition to Roosevelt reflected how radical and thus remarkable his New Deal was for its time.

When Democrats look for a candidate to take on Trump in 2020, they'd do well to study FDR

He overturned a small government orthodoxy to electrify the countryside, adjust prices, regulate Wall Street, establish social security and support the union movement. How did he do it?

For a start, he was happy to experiment, to try anything that might work, so long as the message was that an activist government was taking the side of the little man. Second, his liberalism was always tempered by conservative instinct. So much energy was spent on helping agriculture, Dallek argues, because Roosevelt had an old-fashioned, bucolic sense of what America was all about. He fretted over balancing the budget — as did the average voter, according to polls — and when it came to welfare, he preferred programmes that put people to work rather than paid them to sit at

home. His liberalism was distinguished from socialism in that it sought not to replace capitalism but save it.

It's customary at this point in any conservative discussion of Roosevelt to say that his economic experiments may have prolonged the Great Depression by meddling with the market — but I'm not going to do that. What right-wingers forget is that the Depression didn't just test American capitalism but the American way of life itself, and the real secret to Roosevelt's success was his ability to revive his citizens' faith in it. Nowadays, liberals seem to dislike America's small-town, popular capitalism — and the middle-class heartlands for whom it means so much. Roosevelt both consciously and naturally embodied the cultural values of those people, reflected in a 'personal routine [which] gave assurances that he was grounded in familiar American customs' — hard work, martinis, poker, stamp collecting and an ability to talk to folks, particularly over the radio, in a way that conveyed authority, humility and complete confidence in the future.

After Roosevelt, only Reagan achieved the same level of public admiration, and he exhibited exactly the same qualities, albeit deployed for a very different political purpose. When Democrats cast around for a candidate to take on Trump in 2020, they should start by dropping the snobbish attitude and picking up a book on FDR.

'The Illegal Act': Roosevelt, in a boat named National Recovery, struggles to save Uncle Sam from the Depression. The cartoon appeared in 1935, when the United States Supreme Court declared the National Recovery Administration unconstitutional



The surgeon and anatomist David Hayes Agnew, teaching at the University of Pennsylvania in the 1880s. The cautious Americans were initially resistant to Lister, who toured the US hoping to convert the sceptics

The germ of a revolutionary idea

Kate Womersley

The Butchering Art: Joseph Lister's Quest to Transform the Grisly World of Victorian Medicine

by Lindsey Fitzharris

Allen Lane, £16.99, pp. 286

Every operation starts the same way. Chlorhexidine scrubbed under nails, lathered over wet hands, palm-to-palm, fingers interlaced, thumbs, wrists, forearms. A soothing routine accompanied by the sound of water hitting a steel trough sink. Washing is an act of safety but also humility. It acknowledges a doctor's capacity to cause disease as well as cure it. More than once I have thought of Joseph Lister — the father of antisepsis (killing germs) and forefather of asepsis (excluding germs completely) — as I perform this hygienic set-piece. Not that he would have liked the idea of me, his sister's great-great-great granddaughter, studying medicine. Lister 'could not bear the indecency of discussing with women the secrets of the "fleshy tabernacle"', and sought to block their membership of the profession.

In the 1860s, much of the surgical establishment dismissed antisepsis as 'hocus-pocus'. They were unwilling to believe that current techniques might actually be harming patients. Instruments were rare-

ly cleaned between cases, surgical aprons stiffened with blood, and surgeons had been known to suck patients' wounds in the middle of an operation. Professional assets included a firm fist that could double as a tourniquet, and the dexterity to flay flesh to the bone in seconds (even if a testicle or finger was collateral damage). A surgeon's currency was speed and strength rather than sanitary practice.

Joseph Lister (1827–1912) — with his 'indescribable air of gentleness, verging on shyness', a stutter and almost 'womanly' concern for others — was not the obvi-

Surgical aprons stiffened with blood, and surgeons would suck patients' wounds in the middle of an operation

ous candidate to overhaul this filthy mess. Medicine didn't run in the family. Devout Quakers, the Listers believed that homeopathy and divine intention were the best healers. Nevertheless, aged 17, Lister found himself in the overcrowded stench of central London embarking on a surgical education.

Lindsey Fitzharris has written a brilliant biography that embeds Lister in his medical moment. The smells and sights of rotting flesh seeped through the capital's streets, into the teaching hospitals and around the graveyards (raided by body-snatchers). It was the time of cholera, smallpox and typhoid. Amid the gore, the intellectual scene of the city was flourishing. Lister

rubbed shoulders with Thomas Hodgkin (whose father had identified the lymphoma that bears his name). Professor William Sharpey encouraged Lister's enthusiasm for the new experimental science of physiology. Lister spent his evenings peering into the achromatic microscope invented by his father, Joseph Jackson, to inspect animal specimens and swatches of human iris. He even tried in vitro fertilisation with cockerel sperm and a chicken egg.

By the time of Lister's graduation, ether and chloroform had ended surgery's 'age of agony'. No longer constrained by a patient's reaction to pain, surgeons ventured deeper into the body with ever more radical procedures. As a result, surgery actually became riskier and infection rates increased. A patient in recovery was interpreted very differently to today: inflammation around the surgical site and 'laudable pus' were seen as reassuring signs. Why certain patients developed systemic sepsis was unclear. Perhaps disease travelled

from one person to another via a pathogenic agent. Or, as the anti-contagionists believed, maybe illness arose spontaneously from dirty conditions, moving through the air in miasmatic clouds.

Lister was unconvinced by both theories. He observed that a patient's environment mattered (death rates were higher in hospital than in domestic settings), but doubted that infective life could arise *de novo*. Prompted by scepticism rather than Archimedean revelation, Lister went back to Joseph Jackson's microscope. Louis Pasteur's recent work in France inspired Lister to make a connection with the microbes he observed in a sample of gangrene. Could infective processes be halted in a similar way to fermentation and putrefaction?

Lister developed a regimen for washing hands and tools in carbolic acid, tending wounds with saturated dressings and spraying a chemical mist over the unconscious patient. As his conviction grew, he agreed to remove a cancerous lump from his own sister's breast, which had already been declared inoperable by two surgical colleagues. Etherised upon her brother's dining room table, Isabella Lister's procedure was a success. Avoiding infection, she survived three years before her cancer recurred.

Fitzharris subtly demonstrates how Lister eventually secured his medical reputation not in spite of, but perhaps because of, his religious upbringing. Quakerism has tended to be portrayed as a distrac-

tion from his scientific interests, particularly as Lister considered leaving medical school to enter the ministry. But once satisfied that surgery was an altruistic path, Lister recognised that evidence alone would not change the status quo. The art of persuasion would be critical to converting non-believers.

The 'scientific Germans' eagerly adopted antisepsis, but the 'plodding and practical English surgeon' and cautious Americans were more resistant. Touring the US, Lister made the most of his platform to evangelise to roomfuls of students and sceptics. By interweaving case histories, demonstrations and rhetoric, he won over a generation of disciples. It wasn't long before he became president of the Royal Society and personal surgeon to Queen Victoria. He was now part of the establishment.

Despite *The Butchering Art*'s admirable detail and vivid storytelling, Fitzharris is slightly heavy-handed with her conclusion that Lister raised the dark curtain of surgical barbarism to let in the light. Without question, ward conditions and operative hygiene have been transformed. But the scourges of gangrene, erysipelas, pyemia and septicaemia — collectively known as 'hospitalism' to Lister's contemporaries — did not disappear. Even with today's antibiotics, surgical patients are not invulnerable. Nosocomial infections are a new strain of hospitalism: MRSA and resistant superbugs threaten to undermine Listerian modernity, and send us back to a time when a scalpel's trace could be the death of you.

First novels

Dangerous living

Keith Miller

Here come three novels marketed as debuts but written by authors with some sort of previous, be it in short stories, journalism, theatre, television or a combination of the above.

The Alarming Palsy of James Orr by Tom Lee (Granta, £12.99) takes a fable and transplants it into real life — in this case bourgeois southern British suburban life — where the neat conclusions we might draw from it if we encountered it in a more distilled form are muffled and made strange. The exemplar of Kafka is obvious (both *Metamorphosis* and *The Trial*); but I found myself thinking also of John Cheever, Richard Yates and other American writers who needle away at the pain and self-delusion behind the sleek lives of the executive class.

James Orr isn't much of an unreliable narrator, just an ordinary, appalling white-

collar mook, who has found himself in what would, in other hands, have been a classic horror-story location: New Glades, a 1960s development, 'built on ancient woodland owned by a monstrously wealthy private trust'. He is the sort of *homme moyen sensuel* who is given rather more sympathetic life in Jon Canter's much underrated *Worth*.

Suddenly and inexplicably deformed by disease, James is treated badly by all except his children. In due course, after a period of anomie and uprootedness, he finds himself acting badly in return to everyone he meets, including his children — though rather less badly than many would in his shoes.

Heather, The Totality by Matthew Weiner (Canongate, £14.99) is a lean, sharp meta-thriller. The writing is laconic and assured, though Weiner can be cloth-eared at times, using the same preposition slightly differently twice in a sentence, and so on. But as storytelling goes — or, given Weiner's celebrated work on *Mad Men*, storyboarding — it is superb.

Heather is the impossibly fragrant daughter of an unhappy Manhattan couple (her father, Mark, is not a million miles away from James Orr, except that he works in finance, and is 'rich but not rich-rich'). A dark star enters their lives in the form of Bobby, a construction worker and matricide, whose life up until now has been a long murk of poverty interrupted by incandescent outbursts of violence.

beetle

to me
you cover
little ground
despite
how fast
you run

to you
I'm nothing
but a passing
cloud
across
the sun

to us
our errands
so important
and
so quickly
done

— Candy Neubert

In short paragraphs the book darts between Mark, Heather, Bobby and Karen, Heather's mother (or rather Mother — the archetypal roles get a capital letter, as in a play or a psychiatrist's case history), setting out an ever-hastening plot, showing how the players misunderstand not just one another but the potentially fatal circumstances they find themselves in. Heather, despite her allegedly prodigious capacity for empathy, mistakes what lies behind Bobby's dead eyes about as seriously as it's possible to mistake anything.

The novel probably intends some sort of comment about money and ennui; the perils of living vicariously through others; masculinity in crisis — though it's a recrudescence of masculinity that saves the day — and the Monster Inside Us All. But it doesn't give itself room to say anything interesting about any of these things. Its gestures towards sophistication, such as the notion (not borne out, as far as I can tell) that psychopaths automatically have the sensory hyperacuity of a Guerlain 'nose', tend to let it down. But you do tear through it — and you're not quite sure what you think when you've finished.

In *State of Emergency* (Epigram, £10) there's a strong case for seeing common ground between its author, Jeremy Tiang, and its subject. (Like his protagonist Henry, Tiang is a youngish Oxford-educated Singaporean.) But it doesn't really read like a personal project — and why should it? It's well researched, informative and even-handed in its view of a chapter of Singapore's history about which many of us know little; but the human factor is underpowered.

There are three key events: the alleged massacre of 24 male villagers by British troops at Batang Kali in 1948; the decision some years later by an impassioned young Chinese-speaking freedom fighter, Siew Li, to dodge the authorities, leave her husband Jason and their twins, Janet and Henry, in Singapore, and go 'inside' — to train with communist militias in the jungle; and the final illness and death of Jason, which brings Henry winging his way home, having set aside his research on the Habsburgs to abseil down his own familial crevasse.

You're left with a sense of of intense personal loss, and of the complexities of the region. But on the political front, other than underlying racial tensions — it's clear that, as elsewhere in the area, communism was a rallying point for Chinese minorities, oppressed or otherwise, before it was any sort of belief system — there's not much debate about the rights and wrongs of it all. On the emotional front, I'd have liked more about Siew Li and Jason after their parting: why she found it so easy to 'move on', and he so difficult. But then it's not my story.

A brutal race

Patrick Flanery

A Long Way from Home

by Peter Carey

Faber, £17.99, pp. 360

More than 25 years ago, Peter Carey co-wrote one of the most audacious road movies ever made, Wim Wenders's *Until the End of the World*, which circles the globe before concluding with a long interlude in the Australian outback. While the film was in the mode of speculative science fiction and Carey's captivating *A Long Way from Home* is a fiercely realist story set in the 1950s, this new book nonetheless shares both that earlier work's fascination with outsiders whose lives spin off in unpredictable directions, and as a profound reverence for Australia's interior and its people.

Outside Melbourne, in the small town of Bacchus Marsh, Willie Bachhuber — a disgraced former schoolteacher and radio quiz-show regular who develops a passion for mapmaking — and his neighbour Irene Bobs — diminutive mother of two and wife of Titch Bobs, one of the best car salesmen in the country — find their lives entangled when Titch decides to enter the Redex Reliability Trial. Although Irene is a better driver than any man, Titch knows they need a navigator to guide them through the punishing 18-day rally that circumnavigates Australia; and Willie, at a loose end after being fired for dangling a racist boy out of his classroom window, is their man.

This is a novel of two dominant moods, split almost evenly down the middle. In the beginning we barrel along anarchically, marvelling at the elegance of Carey's plotting and the explosive joy of the storytelling, from Irene's and Willie's perspectives alternately. They are both misfits in society — Irene too masculine for her gelignite-throwing prankster father-in-law Dangerous Dan Bobs, and Willie too bookish to be anything other than an outsider in the provinces. Carey's description of the Redex Trial is never less than gripping, evoking something akin to a mid-century *Mad Max* aesthetic in which Titch's suburban Holden FJ is transformed into 'a brutal beast, four-eyed, with mesh protected headlights' and 'massive bull bar'.

It is in the midst of the rally itself that a sense of melancholy takes over, shifting into a moving meditation on multiple forms of paternal failure and the culture of racism that have shaped modern Australia. To give away more would risk spoiling the genuine pleasures and pathos Carey has orchestrated, with intricately mapped narrative twists that are subtly foreshadowed yet still surprising. As the characters drive deeper into the interior, we become increasingly aware of the corrosive effects of the

government's pernicious racial policies, which have removed 'half-caste' Aboriginal children from their families and land.

Like Willie Bachhuber, who tries to create maps that depict not only place and location, but also the sedimented layers of time and history, the 'lethal patchwork' of settler colonialism 'on top of the true tribal lands', Carey turns the novel into a staging ground for his own merciless excavation of Australian history.

Reconsider Phlebas

Justin Marozzi

In Search of the Phoenicians

by Josephine Quinn

Princeton, £27.95, pp. 360

So the Phoenicians never existed. Herodotus, that unreliable old fibber, made it all up in the *Histories*. Is this really what Josephine Quinn is saying, or is it just a cunning ruse to stir up a fuss and infuriate the dwindling band of Herodoteans out there?

Because Quinn, a professor of ancient history at Oxford University, declares that her mission is not so much to rescue the Phoenicians from their 'undeserved obscurity' so much as to argue that there were no such people. 'It is modern nationalism that

The Phoenicians have been credited with discovering everything, from the pole star to Cornish ice cream

has created the Phoenicians,' she writes, citing 19th-century French, English and German historians who spoke of the Phoenician 'people' and 'nation' in the age of the nation state.

The Phoenicians are those murkiest and most elusive of prehistorical characters, which is perhaps excusable in a community that existed from around 1,500–300 BC and left little in the way of literary or archaeological evidence. Classicists don't tend to

give them much of a look in. Last summer I joined John Julius Norwich lecturing on a ship. His talk on the history of the Mediterranean, from ancient times to the cruise-ship desecration of today, was a tour de force. Confessing to a lack of interest in the Phoenicians, he gave them just the briefest of cameos. Blink and you'd miss them. The glories of Ancient Greece and Rome still carry all before them.

And yet there they are at the heart of ancient Mediterranean history, some kind of confederation of irrepressible maritime traders and explorers based in the eastern Mediterranean with major cities in Byblos, Berytus (Beirut), Tyre, Sidon and Arwad. They make their entrance onto the literary-historical stage with a first-page mention in the *Histories* of Herodotus, the 5th century BC father of history. He writes that they came originally from the Red Sea, entered and settled in the Mediterranean and immediately began 'to adventure on long voyages, freighting their vessels with the wares of Egypt and Assyria'.

Their influence was intellectually and geographically pervasive, apparently teaching the Greeks the alphabet and establishing the famous Phoenician settlement of Carthage. 'They have been credited with discovering everything from the pole star to Cornish cream,' Quinn writes, noting their acumen as traders in cedar from Mount Lebanon, together with beautifully worked metal, ivory and glass. Both the Old Testament and the *Iliad* pay tribute to Phoenician artistry: in the construction and decoration of Jerusalem's temple of Solomon and the world's most beautiful silver mixing bowl, a prize for the funeral games of Patroklos, respectively.

In Search of the Phoenicians explores the links that connected these people, language and religion foremost among them, while emphasising the absence of ties based on nationhood and ethnicity. To the extent that we can gauge how Phoenicians looked at themselves, ties and communities were more based on cities, families and religious practices than on anything else. The cult of the Tyrian god Melqart, for instance, known to Greeks as Herakles, tied together Phoenician settlements throughout the Mediterranean, in addition to the Greek diaspora. The child-sacrifice cult of Baal Hammon (Kronos in Greek, generally Saturn in Latin) seems not to have caught on to the same degree.

No one called themselves 'Phoenician' in Phoenician, not least because *phoenix* is a Greek word — for palm tree. From all the available evidence, the first person to identify himself as Phoenician was the writer Heliodorus from Emesa (in what is today the Syrian city of Homs) in the 4th century.

Quinn's story is most compelling when she plays to her strengths as a historian and archaeologist (she is co-director of excavations



tions at the Tunisian site of Utica), discussing who the Phoenicians might have been, trawling through the assorted archaeological, artistic, linguistic, literary, religious, epigraphic and numismatic evidence — or lack of it — to develop a clearer view of this shadowy people. She leaves no stone unturned, from archaeological ruins and funerary inscriptions to poetry and drama, in her quest to understand how Phoenicians have, perhaps only after their time, become a people.

She concludes that there has been a lot of 'exciting' work about identity in recent decades, but too little on 'the concept of identity'. Some might counter that the whole field of academic-led navel gazing has never been in ruder health. The danger of plunging into a long-winded debate about 'multiple, fragmented and fluid' identities is that it takes us away from the historical narrative prose favoured by the general reader into the sociological jargon preferred by the specialist. And language matters. 'Herodotus' prose', remarked Aubrey de Sélincourt, one of the most translators of the *Histories*, 'has the flexibility, ease and grace of a man superbly talking'. Few historians have ever matched it.

Ultimately, Quinn is surely right to resist an anachronistic nationhood foisted onto this ancient geographically and culturally diverse community. But one might argue that she is as insistent on a malleable, fluid identity today as the 19th-century European nationalists were with their definition of the Phoenicians as a people. Which is no more than to observe that we are all a product of our times — from the high-spirited Herodotus to today's careful academics.

The eternal visionary

Dominic Green

William Blake and the Age of Aquarius
edited by Stephen F. Eisenman
Princeton, £37.95, pp. 224

On 3 September 1968, Allen Ginsberg appeared on William F. Buckley's *Firing Line*. Buckley exposed Ginsberg's politics as fatuous — the blarney, stoned — but Ginsberg stole the aesthetic victory by reading 'Wales Visitation', a homage to William Blake. 'White fog lifting and falling on mountain brow,' Ginsberg intones, '...teeming ferns/ exquisitely swayed/ along a green crag/ glimpsed through mullioned glass in valley rain.'

'Nice,' Buckley nods. He lets Ginsberg read the whole poem. Ginsberg opposes the artificial imagery of power and money ('London's symmetrical thorned tower / & network of TV pictures flashing bearded

GETTY IMAGES



'Glad Day' by William Blake

your Self') to the vision of the unmediated, natural Self: 'Each flower Buddha-eye.' After six minutes, the roots of Christianity mesh with oriental religion in a vision of physical liberation and spiritual democracy: 'Sounds of Aleph and Aum / through forest of gristle... All Albion one.'

'I kinda like that,' Buckley admits. Even secondhand and soiled, the visionary voice cannot be denied. Buckley believed that 'the ideologues, having won over the intellectual class', had now 'simply walked in and started to run things'. Blake had stood athwart history, yelling 'Stop' to the rationalising, systematising civilisation that coalesced in Georgian London, then conquered the world after 1945. The further the market spread, the higher Blake's stock rose. In 1863, Blake's first biographer Alexander Gilchrist called his subject *pictor ignotus*, the unknown painter. A century later, Blake was a universal poet, the prophet of spiritual revolt in what Buckley called 'an age of conformity'.

Blake's belatedness encourages us to judge him not by his works, but his admirers. A century before *Firing Line*, Swinburne, anticipating Allen Ginsberg in *Blake: A Critical Essay* (1868), spotted 'the points of contact and sides of likeness between William Blake and Walt Whitman'. But Blake, working with 'Ages & Generations' in mind, had hoped for the Blake revival. Before Joni Mitchell called her spoilt and selfish peers 'stardust', Blake wrote that 'Energy is the only life', and got back to the garden, naked in Lambeth, not Woodstock.

He even named the age when, as in the era of the French Revolution, 'Fury! rage! madness! In a wind swept through America.' 'Rouze up O Young Men of the New Age! Set your foreheads against the ignorant hirelings!' Blake wrote in the preface to his epic poem 'Milton' (1810). 'Suffer not the fashionable Fools to depress your powers by the prizes they pretend to give for contemptible works or the expensive advertising boasts they make of such works.'

Accompanying an exhibition at Northwestern University in Illinois, *William Blake and the Age of Aquarius* is the most intriguing book on Blake since Marsha Keith Schuchard's exposé of him as a swinger, *Why Mrs Blake Cried* (2006). America's postwar Blakeans rebelled against expensive advertising and contemptible comfort. However misplaced the fury, and despite a preponderance

of 'fashionable Fools', the results were not all contemptible. The political inspirations are well known; Blake, in Ginsberg's words, warned Thomas Paine to 'get out of London before the fuzz came to arrest him'. But many other Blakean echoes are surprising.

I knew that Blake supplied the chorus lyric to the Doors's 'End of the Night'. But I didn't know that Jimi Hendrix, while living around the corner from the blue plaque marking Blake's residence in South Molton Street, drew on Blake's 'Mary' for 'The Wind Cries Mary', and on 'Jerusalem' for the 'arrows made of desire' in 'Voodoo Chile'. Nor did I know that Kris Kristofferson discovered Blake at Merton College, Oxford, where he played rugby and won a boxing Blue.

Another highlight is Jacob Henry Leveton's essay on Blake's Abstract Expressionist connections. Blake's innovations in colour printing influenced Sam Francis's adoption of 'vibrant color kineticism'. Clyfford Still quoted Blake's individualist Christianity against the impersonality and fear of the Cold War. In *Fearful Symmetry* (1947), Northrop Frye described the vortex as Blake's 'image of infinity'; in the same year, Jackson Pollock painted 'Vortex'.

'One law for the Ox & Lion is oppression,' Blake wrote in his age of conformity. Perhaps it is only a matter of time before Blake's defence of religious conscience and free speech leads modern conservatives to concur with Kris Kristofferson: 'William Blake is my man... Hell, yeah!'

A tough act to follow

Andrew Roberts on the challenges of playing Churchill

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Note:-

Gary Oldman has joined a long list of actors who have portrayed Winston Churchill — no fewer than 35 of them in movies and 28 on television. He is one of the best three. ‘I knew I didn’t look like him,’ Oldman has said. ‘I thought that with some work I could approximate the voice. The challenge in part was the physicality, because you’re playing someone whose silhouette is so iconic.’

We all have our own mind’s-eye view of what Churchill should look and sound like, and his personality was so strong and *sui generis* that it is almost impossible for an actor to impose himself on the role. He is therefore almost always left with either mere impersonation or caricature. Oldman avoided this in *Darkest Hour* through research. ‘I went to the newsreel,’ he says, ‘and what I discovered was a man who had this very athletic tread. He would skip around at 65 like a 30-year-old, he had a sparkle, the eyes were alive, he had a very sort of cherubic grin.’

This is an insight that a number of actors who play Churchill — who came to power in 1940 aged 65 — have missed, and who thus play him as a man in late middle age. Sir Jock Colville, Churchill’s wartime private secretary, who was 41 years younger than him, wrote of how exhausting it was to keep up with the Prime Minister as he bounded up staircases, climbed bombsites and marched quickly down corridors. Oldman catches this. Others have played what Oldman calls ‘this sort of rather depressed grumpy man with a cigar’, but he wanted to ‘give him a bit of a twinkle in the eye’.

Churchill was depicted on the silver screen half a decade before he even became prime minister. The first time was in *Royal Cavalcade* (1935), when he was played neutrally in the movie made to celebrate King

George V’s silver jubilee. The next was in Goebbels’s propaganda film *Ohm Krüger* (1941), about the British invention of concentration camps in the Boer War, where he of course is evil personified. Scarcely less believable were the four Soviet propaganda movies of the late 1940s — that is, after Churchill’s Iron Curtain speech that denounced Stalinism — in which Viktor Stanitsyn played Churchill as a scheming, grasping imperialist. There was an American movie, *Mission to Moscow* (1943), made at President Roosevelt’s request, which was

era remarks about despising Churchill for what he had supposedly done to the Welsh miners were not. Burton had a weird love-hate relationship with Churchill — other statements he made were admiring — but fortunately he stuck to the well-crafted script. The advantage that the TV biopics of the 1970s had over today’s knocking, sneering revisionist movies — which *Darkest Hour* emphatically is not — was that there were many people still alive in 1974 who knew and worked with Churchill. They could pour scorn on inaccuracies, as could audiences.

Still the best depiction of Churchill on a screen is in the eight-part TV series *The Wilderness Years* (1981), in which Robert Hardy inhabited the part of Churchill to such a degree that it affected everything else he did to a greater or lesser extent. (Can one see something of Churchill in Hardy’s depiction of the Minister of Magic in *Harry Potter*?) Hardy’s profound reading about Churchill, and friendship with Sir Martin Gilbert, Churchill’s biographer, helped make the series the success it was, and set the standard for everything that followed. It also allowed Hardy to reprise Churchill in *War and Remembrance* (1988), *Bomber Harris* (1989) and *The Sittaford Mystery* (2006).

Other very good Churchills have been Albert Finney in *The Gathering Storm* (2002), which rightly picked up a Golden Globe and Emmy, and Brendan Gleeson in *Into the Storm* (2009). Just as things looked good for Churchill on screen, however, a slew of frankly ridiculous revisionist films and TV shows were released, which, with the wartime generation then dead or dying, showed a shocking disregard for historical fact, while still posing as that self-contradictory, want-it-both-ways beast, the ‘docudrama’.

In *The Crown* (2016), the six-foot-four



Premier performance: Gary Oldman as Winston Churchill

John Lithgow stoops to play a semi-senile Churchill (who was five-foot-six and certainly not senile), who deliberately murders 12,000 Londoners by not adopting green anti-global warming measures to defeat the London fog in 1952. He is also portrayed lying to the Queen about his stroke in 1953, whereas she was one of the first to be told about it. Similarly, Michael Gambon's portrayal in *Churchill's Secret* (2016) was ruined by unhistorical twaddle. I walked out of Quentin Tarantino's lamentable *Inglourious Basterds* (2009) so I can't report on Rod Taylor's role as Churchill.

Easily the worst Churchill movie ever made was *Churchill* (2017), in which Brian

Cox played a prime minister desperate to see D-Day fail. (Yes, you read that correctly.) I counted 120 historical inaccuracies in those two hours of my life I'll never get back.

I counted 120 historical inaccuracies in those two hours of my life I'll never get back

Off-camera Cox spouted a series of ludicrous views about Churchill — such as that he wanted to invade Germany over the Alps — which showed that he had swallowed the views of the scriptwriter, Alex von Tunzelman, rather than doing his own research into the truth about Churchill.

Gary Oldman, by total contrast, has, through prosthetics, thoughtfulness and superb acting, caught Churchill brilliantly. He acknowledges our preconceptions about Churchill, and mildly co-opts them with charm and acuity. The supporting cast — especially Kristin Scott Thomas as Clementine and Sam West as Anthony Eden — are excellent too. Although there have been very many other creditable Churchills — David Ryall, Mel Smith, Timothy Spall, David Calder and Bob Hoskins among them — Gary Oldman now joins Robert Hardy and Simon Ward in the triumvirate of the greats.

Darkest Hour is in cinemas now.

Exhibitions

Living sculptures

Martin Gayford

Bernini

Galleria Borghese, Rome, until 4 February

Seventeenth-century Roman art at its full-blown, operatic peak often proves too rich for puritanical northern tastes. And no artist was ever more Baroque than Gian Lorenzo Bernini, the supreme maestro of the idiom. But I love his work, which is why, on a spare afternoon in Rome before Christmas, I strolled over to the Borghese Gallery where the largest array of Bernini sculpture ever assembled is currently on view.

Admittedly, the Borghese collection already contains the world's finest collection of Bernini (1598–1680) and has done so ever since the artist's lifetime. But on this occasion some 60 loans — including many full-scale marbles as well as paintings and terracotta models — have been added. Given that much of Bernini's work is immovably attached to the fabric of Roman churches and fountains, this is probably the fullest retrospective that will ever be seen.

It is a feast of creative perversity. The nature of sculpture is to be solid and static,

Who else would have sculpted sunshine? Or the flames crackling under St Lawrence's gridiron?

yet Bernini was constantly trying to carve the insubstantial, fast-moving and softly yielding. That is, to make marble and metal do unsculptural things. The hand of the god Pluto, jovially abducting Proserpina, digs into her thigh in a disturbingly tactile manner, turning the stone into flesh. In the same way — abracadabra! — he could transform a lump of mineral into upholstery. His contribution to the restoration of a classical 'Sleeping Hermaphrodite' was a marble mattress so cushiony-looking that you feel your hand would sink into it.

The thin and fibrous sling with which his David takes aim is another startling sculptural still life. Bernini's 'Cathedra Petri' — not in the exhibition, but the focal point of the huge basilica of St Peter's — is the apotheosis of a piece of furniture. The throne of the saint ascends to heaven amid cherubim and fathers of the church in nodding bishops' mitres and an explosion of clouds and rays of light.

Who else would have sculpted sunshine? Or had a go at carving the flames crackling under St Lawrence's gridiron? 'Apollo and Daphne' — the masterpiece of the Borghese's own collection — is the most paradoxical of all Bernini's triumphs. Here is a chunk of metamorphic rock represent-



'Apollo and Daphne', early 1620s, by Bernini

ing the split-second in which the god catches the nymph — and she turns into a tree.

It's full of things it shouldn't be possible to sculpt. Daphne's face is caught at the moment when her eyes dull and her features freeze. Roots sprout from her toes, wafer-thin leaves and fronds from her fin-

gers. This is a magical metamorphosis in more than one sense.

Similarly, the best of Bernini's portrait busts — of which the exhibition contains a magnificent array — are snapshots in marble. Cardinal Scipione Borghese, the great patron of the artist in his youth, seems to

be pausing in conversation on the point of a remark. This is what Bernini's contemporaries meant when they praised his 'speaking likenesses'. You feel you're meeting this amiable, self-indulgent fellow, almost humorously far from religious austerity.

The same is true of the wonderful head of Costanza Bonarelli of around 1635, on loan from Florence. But whereas the Cardinal seems to be holding forth convivially over the dinner table, the bust of Costanza — a married woman with whom Bernini had a long affair — is a love letter in 3D. You feel her whole presence: the passionate glance, the flying hair, and just how strongly the artist felt about her — dangerously so, as it turned out.

A few years after he made this incomparably intimate portrait, he caught her in an assignation with his brother, Luigi. Seeing them together, Bernini utterly lost it. He attempted to murder Luigi with an iron bar

Bernini attempted to murder his brother with an iron bar and had Costanza slashed with a razor

and had Costanza slashed with a razor by his servant. Pope Urban VIII forgave him for these crimes — the artist was far too useful to punish. But the servant was exiled and Luigi prudently moved to Bologna for a while.

Clearly, Bernini was capable of appalling behaviour. Another example was his treatment of the assistant Giuliano Finelli whose virtuoso skills produced the laurel leaves in 'Apollo and Daphne', not much thicker than a real leaf. Bernini preferred not to acknowledge his contribution so Finelli, feeling slighted, left.

On the other hand, Finelli's own works are weaker versions of his master's, while Bernini produced endless fresh ideas. For much of the 17th century Bernini was artistic dictator of papal Rome, so one could spend delightful days tracking his works through the city — almost all of which are still there. With set-pieces such as the 'Fountain of the Four Rivers', he dramatised the city like an inspired theatrical designer.

The exhibition at the Galleria Borghese is full of pleasures, but it also hints at Bernini's limitations. The paintings are not exciting, except for the portraits of himself. The busts of Christ intended for the artist's tomb are downright vapid. And it is useful to see the statue of St Bibiana, which is usually locked away in an obscure church, as it shows how soppy he could be. The truth is that, although Bernini spent much of his life working for a succession of popes, serious religion feeling was out of his range. He could do fluttering angels, sensual ecstasies like that of St Teresa in Santa Maria della Vittoria, drama and astounding illusions. But for deep feeling and sublime thinking you need to go to his great predecessor, Michelangelo.

Radio Lessons from Rwanda Kate Chisholm

What an incredible statement we heard on *My Perfect Country*. 'I can walk into a boardroom and forget I am a woman,' pronounced Isabelle Masozera, a PR executive, on the World Service programme, which this week visited Rwanda to find out what is happening there to make it qualify for 'my perfect country' status. Her words hit home because of the BBC's current difficulties over equal pay and opportunities.

It appears that the corporation has been less than speedy or judicious in its response to the revelations last year about the substantial differences in earnings between some of its male and female employees. Badly handled, it led to the bizarre situation on Radio 4's flagship *Today* programme on Monday morning when one of its presenters, Carrie Gracie, was also one of the top stories of the day.

She had just resigned from her job as the BBC's bureau chief in China, claiming in a letter addressed to licence-payers, which was gleefully blazoned across several newspapers, that her erstwhile employer 'is breaking equality law and resisting pressure for

a fair and transparent pay structure'. Gracie couldn't be interviewed by her co-presenter John Humphrys (who you could tell was itching to take on the task) because this would have broken the BBC's strict rules on impartiality, although she was later heard on *Woman's Hour* explaining her position. Does this muddle matter?

Yes. Because as a taxpayer-funded organisation the BBC is incredibly privileged as a broadcaster, free from commercial pressures. To respect that privilege it should ensure that it not only manages its finances with scrupulous integrity and transparency but also behaves as a model organisation, leading the way on equality of pay and opportunity between all employees. There are too many overpaid people at the Beeb (they must know who they are) and at the same time too many who would earn a lot more if they chose to move into the commercial world. A radical solution to the equal-pay dilemma would be to downgrade a lot of managers and celebrity presenters in favour of those who burn the midnight oil to deliver first-class programmes to deadline and on budget. Now that would truly lead the way in employer-employee relations.

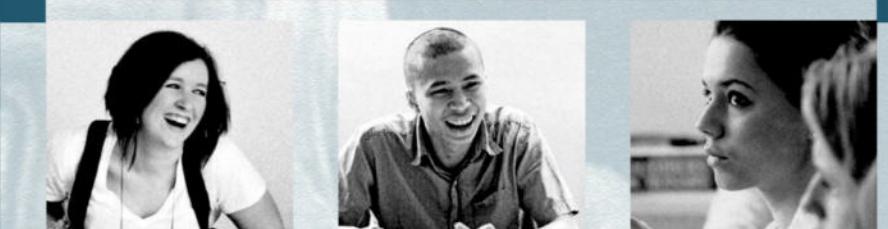
But let's get back to Rwanda and Ms Masozera. She went on to say, 'I just pray that the world catches up with Rwanda.' She's in for a long wait. As Fi Glover, Martha

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Lane Fox, Professor Henrietta Moore and Dr Keetie Roelen sought to explain on *My Perfect Country* (produced by Eve Streeter), Rwanda is a special case. After the massacre of up to 800,000 people in 100 days during the civil war of 1994, men were in short supply. Women, who had suddenly become 70 per cent of the population, had to step in and do the work of men while bringing up their children single-handed. This generation grew up only knowing a world in which women are dominant, by force of circumstance. But the government response was also far-seeing, giving women formal rights in the constitution to land, to education as well as the right to equal pay. The key to women's progress in Rwanda has been this

The gender gap is closing in Rwanda and especially in regard to political and economic participation

awareness that it's not just about money: at least 30 per cent of all decision-making jobs in the public sphere must be held by women.

It's not all positive. The Rwandan correspondent Maggie Mutesi spoke to a young female student who complained that girls are still expected to marry as soon as they have finished school. For a woman to get a loan from the bank, it's much easier if a man goes with her. Ask a man why he beat his wife and he will reply, 'Because she went out without my permission.' But the gender gap is closing in Rwanda and especially in regard to political and economic participation. We could learn something, agreed Glover, Lane Fox, Moore and Roelen.

Saturday afternoon's drama on Radio 4, *Offshore* (directed by David Hunter), was an adaptation by Michael Butt of Penelope Fitzgerald's shifting, haunting novel from 1979. Nenna is living on a barge on the Thames with her two children Martha and Tilda after leaving her husband (or did he leave her? It's not entirely clear). The children befriend the other 'waifs and strays' of 'the offshore brigade' who have ended up on the riverside for reasons that are never clearly stated but which become apparent, usually through Martha and Tilda's clear, unforgiving perceptions. Instead of going to school, they spend their time mudlarking, seeking out fragments of pottery, signs of life before their existence, the river's constant motion another symbol of constant flux and change.

In just under an hour of airtime this could only be a slice of Fitzgerald's book, but Butt's adaptation captured her delicious sense of irony (Nenna's address is Cheyne Walk, the most expensive in London, yet she's living in poverty on a broken-down boat), her winsome style and nebulous plotting, her evocation of childhood and precise pinning-down of what makes us unhappy. Hattie Morahan, Molly Pipe and Rosie Boore excel as the three female leads and there's a deliciously watery, slippery feel to the soundscape.

Opera

Sonic youth

Richard Bratby

Duke Bluebeard's Castle

Barbican Hall

Rigoletto

Royal Opera, in rep until 16 January

Everyone knows — don't they? — that the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain is the UK's youngest world-class symphony orchestra — an ensemble of musicians aged 18 and under that's the equal of any professional band (and better than some). But it's also the largest, and we don't hear enough about the sheer sonic impact of hearing 157 musicians moving with absolute precision. Even the smallest gesture by an 87-player string section has a sort of heft, a physical weight and depth that you can sense in the air around you. Overwhelming when the whole orchestra is playing at full power, it's even more tangible in quiet passages, as if you're in the vicinity of some vast, invisible living creature.

It was a neat idea, then, for director Daisy Evans to make the orchestra into a character in the NYO's concert staging of Bartok's *Duke Bluebeard's Castle*, namely the massive, semi-sentient presence of the Castle itself. The stage directions ask for it to give 'a cavernous sigh, like night winds', so Evans had the orchestra's members produce the sound themselves, with hands over mouths. Neon cables snaked between the players' chairs, glowing blue for tears, yellow for gold or red for blood. Robert Hayward as Bluebeard repeatedly turned and surveyed the immense forces behind him, shoulders slumping, and when the Third Door revealed his treasure-chamber, players lifted their instruments up to glint and sparkle in the coloured light. The surtitles were accompanied by drawings of doors by Chris Riddell, and unnamed members of the National Youth Theatre enthusiastically declaimed the opera's spoken prologue.

It looked striking, as far as it went. With Rinat Shaham standing in as Judith at short notice, and (perfectly understandably) singing from a music stand while Hayward performed entirely in character, you had to wonder if the original intention hadn't been to go quite a bit further. What we got, though, was potent. Hayward is tremendous in this role: a noble ruin of a human soul, whose ringing, deeply expressive declamation is undercut by the different gradations of pain that move across his face. He can make himself look as if he's aged two decades within a single bar of music. Shaham's Judith was subtler and less fierce than some — not afraid to let her voice cur-

dle as she turns the screws on her spouse, but occasionally underpowered against the sheer splendour of the orchestral sound.

That sound, of course, was the point of the evening. You just knew that when the fifth door opened, Sir Mark Elder and the NYO would make the floor shake, and Elder's pacing of the opera's single-act arc was both spacious and urgent. Still, it was the quieter details — world-weary clarinet and horn solos, quivering surges from the cellos, and the stunned fragility of those massed violins in the closing bars — that gave this performance its fever-dream immediacy, and showed you how profoundly Bartok's score had got under the skin of these teenage artists. As well it might.

Meanwhile at Covent Garden, the Royal Opera played out the festive season with David McVicar's 2001 production of Verdi's *Rigoletto*. Superficially, at least, you can see the logic of *Rigoletto* as a Christmas show: a juicy, handsomely dressed helping of Victorian melodrama, stuffed with hummable tunes. But any staging that takes Verdi's tragedy at anything like face value is going to leave an extremely nasty aftertaste, and to his credit McVicar does nothing to sugar that. Apparently the revival director Justin Way has toned down the opening orgy at the Duke of Mantua's court, but the sight of courtiers in gorgeous Renaissance costumes grimly dry-humping

The smallest gesture by an 87-player string section has a weight and depth you can sense in the air around you

each other in the background as the Duke (Michael Fabiano) reels out his 'Questa o quella' certainly soured the mood pretty effectively.

The darkness of this production is its most striking feature. Michael Vale's grungy sets concentrate the drama powerfully and conductor Alexander Joel has a sharp ear for Verdi's gamier orchestral colours. In that setting, the soft-edged glow of Lucy Crowe's singing as Gilda stood out with intense sweetness. Andrea Mastroni's Sparafucile had a tone like bitumen; a brooding, Fate-like figure whose monumental presence could perhaps have given the drama the resonance of Greek tragedy had the production overall been a bit more tightly focused. As Rigoletto, Dimitri Platanias was more alluring and charismatic — vocally at least — than the Duke: Fabiano had power, but sounded as though his voice needed a good rest. On this first weekend in January they all went at it with vigour, without really dispelling the feeling (Crowe and Mastroni apart) that they were performing their parts rather than connecting dramatically. Woolly ensemble from the chorus and interminable scene changes reinforced a distinct end-of-the-holidays feeling. It seemed to be doing a roaring trade, anyway.



Fighting talk: Frances McDormand as Mildred Hayes in *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*

Cinema All the rage Deborah Ross

Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri

15, Nationwide

Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri does, indeed, feature three billboards outside Ebbing, Missouri. They have been placed at the roadside on the outskirts of town by Mildred Hayes (Frances McDormand), a middle-aged woman whose teenage daughter had been raped and murdered seven months earlier. The billboards read: 'Raped While Dying'; 'And Still No Arrests'; 'How Come, Chief Willoughby?' Mildred is grieving, in pain and a ball of fury. But not your regular, everyday ball of fury. She is a ball of fury of the most magnificent, unstoppable kind. If only she could go after every rapist from now on. I'd certainly sleep better in my bed.

Written, directed and produced by the Irish playwright Martin McDonagh (*In Bruges*, *Seven Psychopaths*), the film recently won four awards at the Golden Globes: best

film, best screenplay, best leading actress for McDormand, best supporting actor for Sam Rockwell. And this is satisfying, as it's about a strong woman who won't take shit from anybody (basically) rather than, say, some Brad blubbing about his status. (Boo hoo, Brad; boo hoo.) Plus, in its furious way, it's also a hoot and a blast, which I never thought I'd be saying about a rape movie, if

In its furious way it's also a hoot and a blast, which I never thought I'd be saying about a rape movie

it is that. Hard to know what it is. Beyond 'different' and 'wonderfully so'.

To the plot: Mildred works in the town's giftshop and no one is keen on her billboards. Her husband, who has run off with a younger woman, isn't keen on them. The local priest who pays a visit, stupidly — she rounds on him, in her magnificent, unstoppable fury — isn't keen on them. Her son wants her to move on but she won't — can't. 'Oh, great, we're going the rape-dying route,' he says, as they're about to drive past them. It is often blisteringly funny, which is why it's also a hoot, but it's never funny at the expense of what might be hurting anyone. The comic lines never

felt off. And it's also just so unexpected.

The film isn't a straightforward revenge drama, redemption drama, or fighting-for-justice drama. Instead, the narrative never goes where you think it will go. Instead, it takes your narrative expectations and shreds them before your eyes. Oh, that Chief Willoughby (Woody Harrelson), head of the local police, he's bound to be a toxic, misogynistic monster, you're thinking to yourself. But he isn't. (He is, as it happens, beloved by the town and is awarded his own poignant storyline.) That said, one of his officers, Dixon (Rockwell), is a violent, racist idiot known to beat up black people in custody. But he has his principles. 'So how's it all going in the nigger-torturing business, Dixon?' Mildred asks him. 'You can't say that!' he exclaims, genuinely offended. 'You gotta say persons of colour-torturing business!' But Dixon doesn't go where you expect him to go. Instead, McDonagh prods him in a surprising and interesting direction.

All the performances are excellent, but this was expressly written for McDormand, who owns it, and who is a wonder to behold, as she tears fearlessly into the script. Mildred's dialogue is supremely curse-laden — 'hey, fuckhead,' is how she might address a

police officer — yet the profanity becomes a kind of poetry. She wears a focused scowl, and only smiles the once (I think; it was weird), but as harsh as she can be, you know Mildred has a broken heart under there.

It does fall apart slightly in the third act, when it becomes a bit cartoonish, and people can throw other people out of windows without consequences. And I would also add that we are never asked to consider the pain Mildred inflicts, which is considerable, just as we're never asked to question her own taste for violence. (Tip: if you're a dentist and you ever find Mildred in your chair, don't piss her off.) But as a film that puts a middle-aged woman centre stage, and allows her to kick ass, it has to be terrific. There should be more Mildreds. Then we'd all sleep better in our beds.

Television

Thinking outside the box

James Walton

These days a genuinely controversial TV drama series would surely be one with an all-white, male-led cast that examined the problems of a bunch of middle-class people. (Just imagine the Twitter outrage!) But while we await that — possibly for a while yet — we've now got two highly promising new shows of the more approved 'controversial' kind: where racial issues are tackled in a thoughtful and scrupulously responsible way.

Kiri (Channel 4, Wednesday) has the distinct advantage of starring Sarah Lancashire, whose character Miriam proves that TV mavericks needn't always be doctors, lawyers or cops. They can, it seems, also be social workers. So it was that Miriam was first seen adding something a little stronger to her breakfast coffee. She then headed out into Bristol to show what an all-round good egg she is: delivering a present of sausages to a local crack addict, and telling a teenage boy who'd just broken a girl's arm that he was really a great kid.

Her next task, though, didn't go as smoothly. Nine-year-old Kiri was about to be adopted by a middle-class white couple — but before that happened, Miriam thought the girl should be reminded of her roots by paying an unsupervised visit to her black paternal grandparents. (And if you haven't seen the programme yet, you may want to look away now.) Kiri was then apparently abducted from their house, with her granddad's connivance, by her birth father, who has convictions for GBH and drug-dealing. Even when the girl's disappearance made the *Six O'Clock News*, Miriam still thought everything would end well — which only made Lancashire's stricken face when the body was discov-

ered all the more wrenching.

Faced with the crisis, her bosses soon snapped into action, denouncing her decision to set up the visit as 'bold' and hanging her out to dry. Meanwhile, the newspapers went on the attack with their usual mix of head-shaking sorrow and badly disguised glee, as they accused Miriam of 'ticking all the leftie boxes' by putting Kiri's supposed cultural needs above her safety.

Fortunately, the programme itself is much more nuanced than that, with the 'issues' side of things never overshadowing the human story, and the main characters permitted to be a complicated lot. By the end of Wednesday's episode, in fact, Miriam had turned into something resembling a classic whisky priest: drinking heavily, morally compromised but somehow still appearing to be on the side of the angels.

Jack Thorne's script also has an obvious sympathy with social workers, whose mistakes may not outnumber other people's but generally matter far more. Even her boss acknowledged that Miriam's decisions, however bold, were right 99 per cent of the time — a strike rate most of us would settle for. Luckily, I'm pretty confident I'll increase mine by suggesting that *Kiri* will be among the TV highlights of the winter. (Luckily, too, if I'm wrong, my error probably won't be on the evening news.)

And the same could well apply to ITV's *Next of Kin*. This began on Monday with Mona Harcourt, a saintly doctor, looking forward to the return of her brother, a saintly doctor, who'd been running a medical charity in Pakistan. To welcome him back, Mona laid on a surprise party with her extended family, who took a bit of untangling but duly turned out to be a careful cross-section of British Muslims, from a traditional matriarch to a mini-skirted lesbian sister.

But when Mona's somewhat underwritten husband (Jack Davenport as the male version of all those sweetly supportive TV wives we used to get) opened the front door and the family leapt up to shout 'Surprise!', the person they greeted wasn't Kareem. Instead, it was a policemen bringing news of what we already knew from the first of the episode's memorably powerful scenes: Kareem had been kidnapped by jihadi fighters on the way to Lahore airport. Not only that, but the policeman also seemed interested in talking to Kareem's absent son Danny in connection with a recent bomb in London — a bomb that had increased the sense of Islamophobia felt by that lovely grandmother in particular. And from there, Archie Panjabi's terrific central performance perfectly captured both Mona's confidence in her family's status as fully accepted Brits and the effort that she sometimes had to make to retain it.

But if I'm making it sound as if the programme is simply doing some box-ticking of its own, then that wouldn't fair. Or not

entirely. Again, the idea that most Muslims are very nice, and that it's a shame about the few who aren't, can't be called terrifyingly controversial. Yet, *Next of Kin* shows every sign not merely of shaping it into a proper thriller, but also of allowing it to emerge from a thoroughly imagined family story, rather than imposing it on one.

Theatre

Lost in space

Lloyd Evans

The Twilight Zone

Almeida, until 27 January

Pinocchio

Lyttelton Theatre, until 10 April

The Grinning Man

Trafalgar Studios, until 14 April

The Twilight Zone, an American TV show from the early 1960s, reinvented the ghost story for the age of space exploration. Director Richard Jones has collaborated with Anne Washburn to turn several TV episodes into a single play. Eight episodes in all. Way too many. The structure is designed to bamboozle us from the start. Some of the storylines have been broken up and are placed episodically throughout the piece, while others are preserved as units and delivered whole. Even the most keen-eyed viewer gets flummoxed by this

Played at midnight to an audience of drunks, the show would succeed. For about five minutes

mystery. Among the storylines that baffled me were: a cop quizzes some stranded bus passengers to find out which is an alien; a little girl vanishes through a worm-hole in space-time; a man is haunted by a lack of sleep; a group of airmen returning from a mission discover that two or three (or perhaps just one) of them have been airbrushed out of newspaper reports. A group of angry neighbours fight over the last berth in a bomb shelter during a nuclear attack.

The show looks cheap and flimsy and it aims for an atmosphere of goofy pastiche. There are lots of gags involving silly props and mysteriously vanishing cigarettes. One of the actors specialises in an 'amusing' laugh. Played at midnight to an audience of drunks, the show would succeed. For about five minutes. Then it would stale. The running time is two-and-a-half hours. I've seen a few muddles posing as dramas at the Almeida but this is one of the hardest to disentangle.

Pinocchio is the story of a genial car-



MARC BRENNER

Missing in action: Cosmo Jarvis and Oliver Alvin-Wilson in The Twilight Zone at the Almeida

penter who carves a toy out of a plank of wood. The toy, Pinocchio, is possessed by a single ambition: to dispense with his wooden nature and become a human being like his creator. Arranging the puppetry for this script must be the easiest task in showbusiness: Pinocchio should be represented by a puppet and the human characters should be represented by human beings. John Tiffany's production at the National reverses this set-up. The humans are played by puppets. And Pinocchio, the puppet, is played by a human being who wears nothing but skimpy breeches, as if to remind the audience that he's made of flesh and blood rather than timber. All rather puzzling.

To make things even more topsy-turvy, the puppets on stage (who represent human characters) dominate the action. Physically, these mannequins are huge, like weather-balloons, with vast immobile faces and gangly limbs operated by levers manipulated by shuffling assistants. They seem to drift in midair like beach balls caught in a wind-spiral. Their faces, incapable of movement, are unable to convey changes of mood or sentiment and their lack of vitality reduces

the show's pace to slow motion. Few in the audience cared much for these conceptual own goals. My son, aged 11, hailed the show as 'brilliant' and 'nearly as good as *Aladdin*'. I should add that he spent a fair amount of time nudging me and asking me in whispers if I wasn't bored.

Victor Hugo's novel *The Grinning Man* has been turned into a hit musical by Bristol

A flimsy piece of apparatus manages to replicate a wolf's furtive and sinuous menace

Old Vic. Now it arrives in the West End. The central character, Grinpayne, is an orphan who was attacked in infancy by an unknown thug who left him with a hideous grin plastered across his face. Grinpayne is discovered by a sweet-natured impresario who exhibits him to paying audiences. With them is a beautiful blind child, Dea, whom Grinpayne falls in love with. They're joined by a slavering wolf, Mojo, who at first threatens but later befriends them. Grinpayne's mission is to discover the identity of the criminal who disfigured him and to win the heart of Dea.

There's plenty of material here for a romantic fairy tale but the story has another layer of narrative complexity. The setting is a pastiche version of Regency London where a decrepit king, Clarence XII, lies on his deathbed. His children are a set of bickering egomaniacs who indulge in incestuous orgies at the palace while tussling over the right to succeed their father. One of the royal princes visits the circus and becomes enraptured by Grinpayne's frozen smile. The two stories cross-fertilise and we jump between the power games at the palace and Grinpayne's quest to identify his childhood assailant. The changes of gear are a little bumpy and Grinpayne's desire to win the heart of Dea is never seriously threatened. But the show works very well as a musical. The tunes are strong, the singing is excellent. And the puppetry, modest in scale, is superb.

Mojo the wolf is the latest achievement from Gyre and Gimble (who created *War Horse*). Two actors using a flimsy piece of apparatus manage to replicate a wolf's furtive and sinuous menace. Mojo may not be very cuddly but the effect is astonishing.

A Gyptian weekend

By Juliet Rix

Philip Pullman's latest missal, *La Belle Sauvage*, once again features the boat-dwelling Gyptians. Rough and honourable, they emerge from the waterways of Brytian to help the heroine Lyra, before disappearing back to their watery world, one that runs through Lyra's, but is separate and different from it. After a long weekend on the canals in the heart of Britain, I feel I have been drifting in Pullman's wake.

'Just steer her in here,' says the boatman. We are new to the canals, so he is taking us through the first lock. 'Straight in.' He must be joking: only one lock gate is open. The gap is about six inches wider than the boat. But his weathered face is completely straight — and completely calm. Deep breath.

We make it into the lock without damage. Our boatman disappears up the towpath, and we are alone on the canal. First we have to slow down. Having boarded our smart green-painted narrowboat at Kate Boats on the outskirts of Birmingham, our route hugs that of HS2. The train will soon whizz passengers to London in 49 minutes. By boat, it would take us a fortnight.

Fortunately, there is something meditative about steering gently along a narrow channel flanked with hedgerows. Locks, of course, are not meditative. But they are satisfying. They are everything the digital



Canals and calm: Enjoying life in the slow lane

age is not: physical, controllable, perfectly designed technology... and unchanging.

It is easy to imagine the 19th-century families whose lives were lived on the canals. And the canal equivalent of Land Girls — the so-called Idle Women, unfairly named for their IW (Inland Waterways) badges — who 75 years ago hauled open these same lock gates. Usefully unnoticed, they dragged 50-tonne loads along this wartime lifeline between Birmingham and London.

Though it's half a century since the last working boat passed this way, the Inland Waterways still have their own camaraderie. We are taught the unwritten rules by the boat ahead which waits for us to slip (or

bump) in beside it at lock after lock (ensuring water is never wasted by unnecessary openings). We in turn teach the newbies behind us. And everyone takes their turn at the windlass. The ways of the water are quickly entrenched so a single failure to co-operate by another boat jars terribly.

We wave, get steering tips (you have no control when reversing), play boat-to-boat catch (and canal-to-boathook retrieval), share tree-fresh apples from a lock-side 'help yourself' box, race (at a daring 5 mph), and chat as we rise or fall between close stone walls. There are constant stories: the ferret-owning barefoot boatie; the ancient canal-side drovers road; the giant reptiles that once roamed the region — now fossilised in the blue lias limestone through which the Stockton Locks are cut.

We are quickly absorbed into canal life — more so than we realise until we are jolted back into the terrestrial world. Leaving the boat, we cut through the hedgerow and up a mud path to find ourselves on a six-lane road bridge. I stand shocked, like a newly landed alien, as cars blast past, horns hoot, traffic lights flash.

How did we not know? All this, just feet from our parallel world wending its peaceful way through an oblivious Britain — or Brytian.

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— Tanya Gold, p62

LIFE

High life

Taki



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What I miss most up here in the Alps are the literary lunches conducted on the fly with writers like Bill Buckley, Alistair Horne, Natacha Stewart, occasionally Dmitri Nabokov and, yes, movie star and memoirist par excellence David Niven. This was back in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, during the winter months and in between ski runs. Bill would ring early in the morning and suggest a run somewhere, then he'd pick an inn in the vicinity where we'd meet David and Natacha, two non-skiers, and that was that. Buckley always referred to me as Führer — once on the slopes, of course — as I would go down first, followed by him and Alistair Horne, the two not always steady on their skis, and at times more out of than in control. Once we were safely down, the fun began.

Natacha wrote for the *New Yorker*, in the days when it was a well-written weekly and not the race- and transgender-obsessed leftie vehicle of today. Her main gripe was the editing. She would not permit 'an iota to be changed', which made me envy her as if she were Ava Gardner (an obsession of mine back then). I was writing for *National Review*, Bill's baby, and I had been told that my stuff was heavily edited — the second most edited copy in the magazine behind that of a German intellectual with a double-barrelled name. Bill suggested I go to school again and learn proper English usage, or try to learn by listening to the sound of good English. I immediately chose the second option.

Alistair Horne preferred to talk about history, as he was a historian, and always went back to the Greek civil war of 1944–51. 'Taahki, you should try that. You already know so much about it,' he'd sweetly suggest to me as the first bottle of white wine was opened. Then he'd clam up and look nervous as hell if the word Chile came up. He was due to start his history of the fall of Allende after the skiing, and it made him terribly depressed. The book was a success and I loved the title, *Small Earthquake in Chile*.

Alistair always got that way before starting one of his books, but skiing and wine and the talk about women helped him unwind.

The mysterious Dmitri Nabokov was among the best-looking men ever. He was the only son of the great Vladimir, and a close friend of the Buckleys, as were his parents who lived 45 minutes away in Montreux. Dmitri was an opera singer, a racing driver and a novelist, but one who wrote under a pseudonym that none of us ever discovered. One of the games I played with him was to announce that I had found out his pen name, and blurt out 'Romain Gary' or, if drunk, 'Grace Metalious', the bestselling female author of *Peyton Place*. I almost got hit for that one.

David Niven would tell us stories about Hollywood, and so when his great bestselling *The Moon's a Balloon* was published, the joke among us was that we should not waste any time even opening it as we had

Bill Buckley suggested I go back to school and learn proper English usage

heard every single story — sometimes more than once. When my first book, *The Greek Upheaval*, was published in the UK by Tom Stacey and in the US by a publisher who went broke almost immediately, the bookstore on Gstaad's main street — yes, there was a bookstore, long before it became a luxury-goods store attended by high-class hookers — showcased it and my moment of triumph had arrived. In fact, the book with my name on its cover was in the middle, shadowed by one by Bill Buckley and by a bestseller predicting the crash of capitalism by 1979. (Close but no cigar, as communism collapsed in 1989, but what's ten years where oracles are concerned.)

The lunches were literary, but no one touched upon what I wanted to hear and learn from: things like rhythm and idioms, and pauses and innuendos. Bill wrote a novel each winter based on a CIA operative who had a one-night stand with the Queen of England, Queen Caroline. His novels were based on plot and action, and there wasn't much dialogue or suspension of real speech to learn from. Never mind, they were the best lunches ever because Buckley was always in a hurry, so we'd down a couple of bottles of wine and then hit a Pflümli or two, the Swiss grappa that supposedly makes hair grow on one's chest.

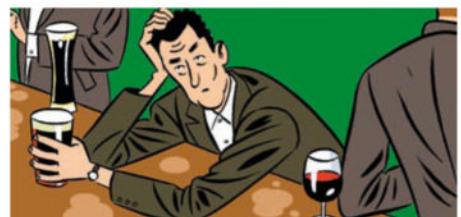
Back then we skied better and faster after drinking. Niven would stay behind reminisc-

ing — as articulate as ever while under the influence, looking always the English gent in his tweeds — in a simple wooden hut high up in the Alps. Straight out of Conan Doyle, actually. Natacha would fret about iota, and Dmitri would head back down to places unknown to us. Alistair Horne was the last to die last year. Bill went eight years ago, and Dmitry about six. Natacha died 15 years ago after losing a son. Niven left us in 1984.

Gstaad has changed and there are no bookstores or writers around. Those charming huts that served simple food and chilled white wine have gone upmarket; you need to show a bank balance to get in. I now lunch at home and occasionally up at the club. Things ain't what they used to be.

Low life

Jeremy Clarke



By New Year's Day I'd had enough of festivities. Instead of getting out of bed, I turned over, put my face to the wall and refused all offers of food, drink and conversation. I kept this up throughout the day and into the evening, when I had to get up to go to the toilet. Asked for an explanation of such childish behaviour, I blamed the wind — a cold, violent Mistral that had been blowing since Christmas Eve.

The cypresses were still twirling and bowing the next day. Though not yet restored enough to dance the Gay Gordons, I felt a bit more sociable, and in the evening we went out. A neighbour, Professor Brian Cox, had invited us over to his house to play the board game *Escape From Colditz*. He and his family have developed a passion for the game and they thought I might be a potential convert. When we arrived, the board, depicting a bird's-eye view of Colditz castle and environs, was unfolded on the dining-room table. Drinks were issued. Then we gathered around it and Professor Cox explained the rules of the game.

He once explained Einstein's theory of relativity to me in 20 minutes over a risotto and I almost — I say almost — grasped

it. I might not have been on the same page as him come the end, but I was on the right bus to the library. The rules of *Escape From Colditz*, however, are much more complex than Einstein's theory of relativity and probably disprove it. Even physicist, astronomer and cosmologist Professor Brian Cox confessed that he hadn't quite yet got his head around them. But he patiently outlined them to me as far as the limits of his current research and understanding allowed. Basically, there are three escape teams of ten prisoners (coloured wooden counters) and someone has to be the Nazis (black counters). This is always Mrs Cox because she likes to be the Nazis. Whether she likes to be the Nazis in spite of her staunchly progressive outlook in real life or because of it I didn't ask. Either way, she threw herself into the role of a cold-hearted camp Kommandant, even as she passed the nibbles around.

The movements of both prisoners and guards are determined by the roll of two dice. If you throw a double you throw again. Before making a dash for it, prisoners must assemble a collection of items, such as rope, keys, wire cutters and false papers, hidden at various locations within the castle walls, and concoct a plan. In the outwitting of the guards, prisoner escape committees can co-operate. Also, players are encouraged to practise duplicity of every conceivable sort when dealing publicly or privately with the player who has chosen to be the Nazis. This last overriding rule of the game struck me as amazingly anarchic and perhaps the final nail in the coffin of Christian civilisation. As I mentally grappled with it, the needle on the dial showing my post-Christmas brain storage capacity leant hard over into the red, and perhaps there was a faint smell of burning, because the Cox family kindly said that, well, perhaps it would be best if we started playing the game. All being well, I would pick things up as we went along.

So away we went. During the first round of dice throws, the disciplined Nazi guards fanned out to cover the escape routes; Professor Cox's senior British officer headed for the shower block; and mine followed him in. Pressed by Professor Cox for an explanation of my apparently futile and slavish move, I said that my man was celebrity-mad and wanted to serve him as his vassal.

The next time the dice were passed to me, I threw a whopping 27 with three consecutive doubles. His advances spurned, my Senior British Officer ran pell-mell through the fortress and flung himself at an outside wall, which he scaled with the aid of two ropes. In the full glare of a searchlight he then dashed across the moat, snipped his way through the perimeter fence with a pair of stolen wire cutters and made a successful dash for the undergrowth. He was home and dry and languidly filing off a hangnail before anyone else, either prisoner or guard, had moved a muscle.

The Coxes fell silent. Mrs Cox lifted a satirical Teutonic eyebrow. The timing and speed of my chap's escape was unprecedented in the history of the board game of *Escape From Colditz*, apparently, whether those games were played here on planet Earth or in a parallel universe, of which there could be an infinite number. If the rules hadn't stipulated TWO escapers to claim victory, the game would have been over right there and then.

Real life

Melissa Kite



'Not being rude, but I don't think you should do any DIY,' said the gamekeeper.

He had just witnessed me make chicken soup by liquidising a boiled chicken carcass then pressing all the wrong buttons on the liquidiser, so detaching the bottom of the jug from the jug rather than releasing the jug from the machine, sending a deluge of soup downwards on to the kitchen counter and floor.

Cydney was standing below, ever hopeful, so as the cascade of soup splashed on to the spaniel's head she simply tilted herself to gargle down the rain of good fortune.

The keeper, who had popped in for a coffee, had been listening to me excitedly reciting my plan to finish the house myself by doing all the outstanding work bit by bit with my own fair hands, no matter how many years it took me.

I would drill, hammer and paint my way to glory, I told the keeper, finally sorting out my life for myself, with no help from anyone. No more Cinderella complex. No more male rescuers needed.

'Right you are,' said the keeper, then added: 'So do you want me to drill that piece of plaster board in front of the loft entrance or not?'

'Yes, obviously...' I checked myself. 'No. It's fine. I can do that myself. Soup?' I had swilled as much as possible into a pan. Waste not, want not. The keeper grimaced as I sloshed liquid chicken with my bare hands across the counter and into the pan: 'No, thank you.'

Later, after I had cleared up the rest of the soup, which had leaked into every crevice of the worktops — at least my new kitchen smells homey — I hauled the piece of board into place in front of the corridor leading to the loft I cannot now afford to convert, and whose non-insulated roof consequently leaks

cold air into the rest of the house, a cruel internal wind of failure.

I tried drilling a screw into the board with the hand drill but it just jiggled and popped out, and I was on the verge of giving up and either calling the keeper, Stefano the Albanian, or possibly even asking the builder boyfriend to take me back, when I suddenly had the idea to try a screwdriver.

This worked a treat. I should have known, low tech is my thing. With my loft corridor newly closed up, the house was draft-free and toasty warm, and I settled down to think what else I could do myself.

After nailing up a few paintings to hide holes in walls I can't afford to plaster, I tried to unblock the main drain under a huge man-hole cover on the patio and, pounded by wind and rain, promptly fell into it.

Well, I can build up to engineering. The main thing was that I had my resolve: the new year would mean fewer disasters and more competence all round.

I set off in good spirits for a weekend at a friend's house on a country estate in Hampshire, and after a relaxing couple of days got into the Volvo to come home and promptly drove straight over a stone marking out the driveway. The front driver-side tyre, one of

No more Cinderella complex. No more male rescuers needed

four new Continentals fitted three weeks ago, duly burst open, and as I got out of the car a loud hissing confirmed that I had shredded it.

The car sat on the rim, the tyre utterly deflated. I felt the same. The wait for the RAC was three hours and my new policy of doing everything for myself only got me as far as opening the boot and peering at the huge metal hoojamaflip that winds the spare tyre down from the undercarriage.

I pulled the thing out of its casing and flung it about to no avail. What was worse, the keeper couldn't help me now. I was miles from his jurisdiction. Luckily, my friend knew the keeper there and was on the phone to him immediately.

When a Kubota hoved into view and two men in camouflage got out, I knew I was saved.

'How come gamekeepers are the only people who can fix anything?' I asked the keeper by text as the other keeper changed my tyre.

'What have you done now?' he asked. I told him. 'You're unbelievable,' came the reply. 'Put me on the phone to him and I'll thank him.' Evidently, there is some unspoken code between keepers. When one keeper's friend gets into trouble in another keeper's jurisdiction, a form of diplomatic immunity kicks in.

In any case, the Hampshire keeper was all smiles, and sent me on my way to drive back to Surrey on the space-saver at 40mph, beginning 2018 as I will no doubt go on.

Wild life

Aidan Hartley



Kenya

First comes a distant hum, rising in volume until I hear it coming straight at me like Niki Lauda behind the wheel of his Ferrari. The blue sky darkens. I duck as swarming bees zoom overhead, trailing their queen. They are gone again in a second, coiling off in a shadowy murmuration across the veldt. After the rains, several swarms hurtle over us daily looking for homes, criss-crossing in the air.

When bees nest in our farmstead walls we leave them be. Anybody who has had bees live under the eaves will know how cosy it is to lie in bed at night, listening to the soporific thrum of countless beating wings. When bees swarm in the kitchen or chimney, burning two or three large turds of desiccated elephant dung produces a cloud of smoke with the aroma of incense, Montecristo and pachyderm bowel — and the insects swiftly vacate.

Laikipia is honey country. Honey from grass blossom is clear as water, honey from forest flowers reaches almost black, but the finest is honey from jasmine-scented wait-a-bit thorn, which blossoms in the driest weeks before the rains, making the landscape resemble a peach orchard in spring, or a forest after snowfall. For years I have bought honey from our neighbour Gilfrid Powys. He tended hundreds of beehives on his ranch and on Christmas Eve he kindly gave me a present of two large pots of his best honey. Three days later an elephant killed Gilfrid and this signals the passing of an era. He was a giant figure in Kenya, a great Boran cattle rancher, aviator, conservationist, aficionado of camels and rare aloes. Among his many attributes that his neighbours will miss, he was a beekeeper.

It was Gilfrid who inspired me to keep bees and more than a year ago we started several dozen brood hives on the farm. A young beekeeper, Charlie, came to help me set these up and through him I began to learn the basics. Sweating in my heavy bee suit, I was fascinated to watch Charlie and Leshomo, one of our Samburu stockmen, work without gloves or any protection as they opened the hives to check on brood combs. Their skin crawled with bees yet they were hardly stung. In the past year I have been stung multiple times, until I felt I was building a resistance like my friends who are entirely comfortable with bees. Walking with a Samburu elder one day, we found a

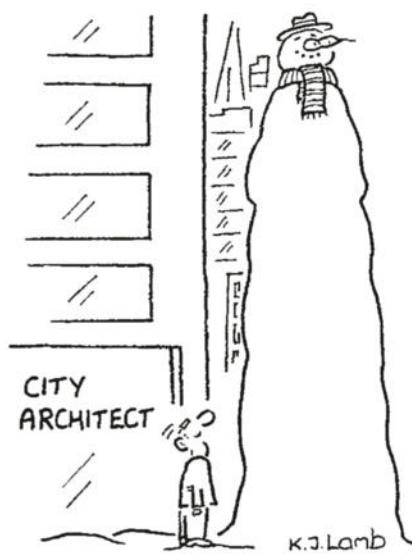
cobweb across our path in which a bee was trapped alive. As I waited, the man spoke softly to the creature and used the point of his spear to gently cut it out of its silk prison — and only when it had been liberated were we allowed to proceed.

Our hives will shortly begin to produce hundreds of kilos of honey and my plan is to supply raw honey, propolis (a natural remedy that supposedly boosts your immunity and a substance used to varnish Stradivarius violins) and bee venom to the organic honey business run by Charlie's father, my friend Andrew Wright. To discuss business, this week I visited Andrew's honey and kombucha shop in the old coastal town of Malindi, tucked away behind the fish market, near the old pillar erected by Vasco da Gama. It

I had developed hives all over my body, my ears had swelled shut and I was fire-engine red

was time for my January detox, so no booze — and to clean out my system I drank one of Andrew's papaya-leaf kombuchas and purchased a pot of prickly-pear honey. Andrew provides bee-venom therapy for the afflicted and declaring that this was just the thing for my detox, I asked him to sting me. 'Raise your shirt,' Andrew said and with tweezers he applied beestings in two spots on my back. This, I sensed as the pain spread, was making me feel better already. An hour later at home I had developed hives all over my body, my ears had swelled shut and I was fire-engine red. I felt there was no point driving back to see a doctor because I would be too late. 'Andrew,' I said on the phone, 'I think I have anaphylaxis.' 'Drink two big tots of vodka,' he said. 'Whisky?' 'That will do.' It was half-a-litre of Jameson's and a bottle of blush before the hives passed.

My New Year's detox was over, but I toasted Gilfrid embarking on his great camel trek across the constellations — and all the bees of Laikipia.



Bridge

Susanna Gross

My friend Neil Mendoza and I had a great finish to 2017 when we won the Portland Club's annual Auction Pairs (which is always a highlight of my year). I can't pretend we had any real expectation of winning, but a combination of good luck, good play and flawless bidding by Neil meant we scooped the £8,000 jackpot (actually we only got half, as Stuart Wheeler had bought 50 per cent of us).

Since then, alas, things have been slipping downhill: I had a poor result with David Gold at the Year End mixed pairs, and last Sunday, a solid beating at the Young Chelsea's 'pivot' teams. Time to buck up for 2018! On Sunday, amid a host of poor decisions, this hand sticks most in mind. My partner and I had an early misunderstanding in defence, and the declarer, Tim Gould, made a brilliant play to ensure we carried on down the wrong track:

Dealer South

N/S vulnerable

♠ 4
♥ 9 8 6
♦ A J 8 3
♣ Q J 10 5 3

♠ 8 7
♥ A K 10 7 5
♦ 7 4
♣ K 9 7 4

	N		E
	W		S

♠ 10 9 5 3
♥ J 2
♦ 10 9 5 2
♣ A 8 6

♠ A K Q J 6 2
♥ Q 4 3
♦ K Q 6
♣ 3

West	North	East	South
2♥	Dble	pass	4♦
All pass			

Sitting West, I led the ♥K. Normally, the king asks partner to give 'count' in the suit — but some people prefer to give 'attitude' signals, and my partner thought that's what we'd agreed. So on my ♥K he played the ♥2 ('reverse' attitude: encouraging). I continued with the ♥A. My partner followed with the ♥J, and South (Tim), with no hesitation whatsoever, played his ♥Q! Clearly, he was the only one who knew what was going on. Now, convinced that my partner had started with ♥J42, I assumed the ♥J was a suit-prentence signal, showing the ♦K. It was vital, then, to switch to a diamond. If I played my winning ♥10, declarer might ruff, draw trumps and play ♣A and another club for a diamond discard. Of course that was exactly what Tim wanted: he won the diamond in hand, drew trumps, and discarded his club on the fourth diamond.

Things can only get better...

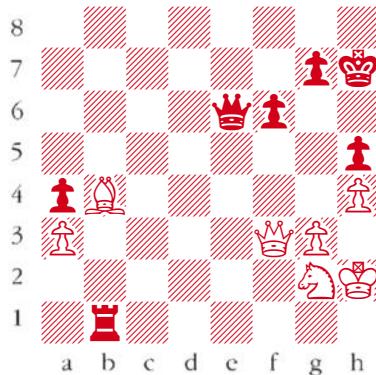
Chess

On speed

Raymond Keene

Although it does not have the prestige of the Classical World Championship (to be staged in London in November), the Rapid and Blitz championships recently concluded in Saudi Arabia carried not just worthy titles, but an impressive overall prize fund of \$2 million. Viswanathan Anand emerged victorious in the Rapid, while Magnus Carlsen dominated the Blitz. The only fly in the ointment was the refusal to grant visas to Israeli players, an omission excoriated by Carlsen. This week, key extracts from play in both championships.

McShane-Anand, Riyadh Rapid 2017



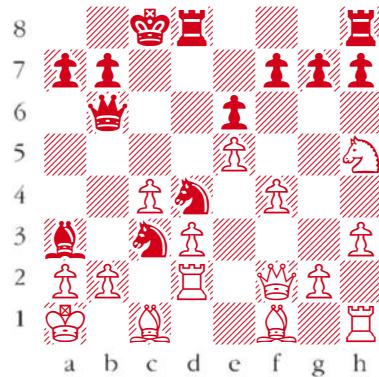
The veteran new champion strikes with a bolt from the blue against a leading British grandmaster and winner of the recent UK Knockout Championship. **51 ... Qh3+! 52 Kxh3 Rh1 mate**

Karjakin-Esipenko, Riyadh Rapid 2017 (see diagram 2)

The defending champion is poleaxed by a blow which would have gladdened the heart of Frank Marshall, who crushed Levitsky with an unexpected Queen sacrifice at Breslau 1912. According to Marshall, his coup was greeted with a shower of gold coins by the onlookers.

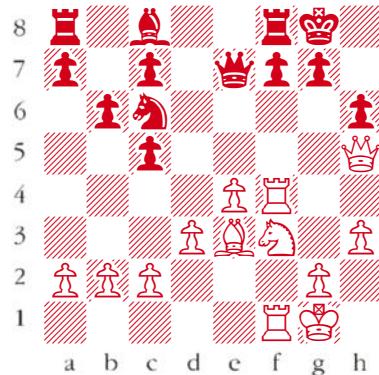
22 ... Qb3 23 bxc3 23 axb3 Nxb3 is a beautiful mate. **23 ... Qxc3+ 24 Bb2 Bxb2+ 25 Rxb2 Qc1+ 26 Rb1 Nc2+ 27 Qxc2 Qxc2** With a queen against just two minor pieces, the position

Diagram 2



is easily winning for Black. **28 g3 b5 29 cxb5 Rd4 White resigns**

Carlsen-Karjakin, Riyadh Blitz 2017



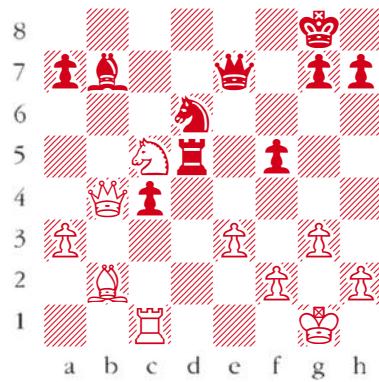
19 ... Be6 19 ... g5 would trap the white rook but the weakening of the black kingside allows White to break through with an amazing sacrificial sequence: 20 Rh4!! gxf4 21 Bxh6 Bd7 and now the incredible 22 Bg7!! wins, the main point being 22 ... Kxg7 23 Ng5 Rh8 24 Rxf7+. **20 Rh4 f6 21 Qg6 Qf7 21 ... Bf7** was the best defensive try. **22 Qg3 Nb4 23 Bxh6 Nxc2 24 Ne5 fxe5** Giving up the queen is hopeless but so is 24 ... Qe7 25 Ng6. **25 Rxf7 Rxf7 26 Qg6 Bxa2 27 Bg5 Rff8 28 Rh7 Rf7 29 Bf6 Black resigns**

PUZZLE NO. 488

Black to play. This is from Carlsen-Anand, Riyadh Rapid 2017. The needle clash from the Rapid was Anand's destruction of Carlsen. What was Black's key move? Answers to me at *The Spectator* by Tuesday 16 January or via email to *victoria@spectator.co.uk*. There is a prize of £20 for the first correct answer out of a hat. Please include a postal address and allow six weeks for prize delivery.

Last week's solution 1 ... Qxc6

Last week's winner Malcolm Burn, Tuffley, Gloucester



Competition

First thoughts

Lucy Vickery

In Competition No. 3030 you were invited to provide a poem entitled 'January'.

I mentioned William Carlos Williams, R.S. Thomas and Dante Gabriel Rossetti in the brief for this challenge, all of whom wrote poems with 'January' as their title. But that most maligned of months also lands a starring role in the opening stanza of George Barker's charming poem 'January Jumps About': 'January jumps about/ in the frying pan/ trying to heat/his frozen feet/ like a Canadian...'

Freezing temperatures were very much on your minds, too, and for hot-flush-riden Jayne Osborn they are a cause for celebration. The winners printed below are rewarded with £25. Chris O'Carroll is overall champ and earns £30.

One face surveys the long, cold month behind,
One contemplates the deep, short freeze ahead.
Too much of nature on your watch, you find,
Is more than metaphorically dead.

Yours is the standstill at the end and start:
The pied, bright spring will flourish from this ice;
Refreshed from every flower's fragrant heart,
The air will soften as it wells with spice;

From silver frost a golden sun will climb,
Gilding green pastures, warming every beach;
The crops and herds will fatten in their time,
Full of those lessons plenty has to teach;

But once brief bounty has been stored away,
The harsher lessons learned from scarcity
Will loom; the cold truth of the shortest day
Will dim the world your backward gaze can see.
Chris O'Carroll

Of January wary be!
The fairy on the Christmas tree
Can wave no more her magic wand,
She's in the loft, she won't respond.
A cold east wind from Europe blows
But what it augurs no one knows,
It bites the ears and seems to moan
'We'll freeze you out. You're on your own.'
Then, turning to the west, we hear
The Mighty Trump sound loud and clear:
A wild, discordant blast that hails
More vehement storms and violent gales;
This month bodes ill but all's not lost,
The spring might yet unfreeze the frost,
And kinder months are on their way,
There's always hope, there's always May!
Alan Millard

Cooler month, you find us huddled
In the ashes, ex-Noelled;
Overhung, contrite and muddled
Needing Christmas fog dispelled.

Mark our faces, whitened, ashen,
Pull us up and set us straight.
January, with compassion
Save us from this chastened state.

Back to work now firmly send us;
Pay no heed to our complaints.
With new discipline amend us,
Set our boundaries, cast constraints.

Slowly then, reveal your glory:
Longer days to which we cling;
Month of firsts, renew our story,
Send us hopeful into spring.
Paul Carpenter

January now. It should be cold,
Freezing breath and slippery underfoot
With frost and hoary leaves in every fold
Of earth, its hard and wizened face like soot
Where spiders' webs and scattered dirt streak out
From corners where the hose has splashed in
pots.

But still the soil is soft and through it sprout
The sturdy spears of daffodils and knots
Of tiny seedlings. Still the canna stand
Erect and green, like loyal sentries fixed
On duty as the seasons' change is spanned,
And autumn's death and spring's new life are
mixed.

But who knows what the morning light will
show —
Cold sexton winter still could bring us snow.
Katie Mallett

There are three months that start with J:
January, June, July.
June leads July but follows May.
Does anyone know why?

In June the weather's fairly warm;
In July much the same.
But rain and sleet and icy storm?
That's January's game.

June as we know can name a girl.
July is Caesar's tag.
Cold January's a cruel churl,
A murderous old lag.

As sensual souls beneath the moon
We can enjoy a flux
Of pleasure in July and June,
But January sucks.
Basil Ransome-Davies

We welcome you and yet you turn your back
On thoughts of spring, presenting snow and ice.
Our streets are traps, our pavements icy black
And bleakness wrapped in bleakness is your vice.
December loved our generosity
And rang her bells with optimistic joy
But you arrived with animosity
To inconvenience, anger and annoy.
There was a time in childhood when your snow
Had playful kindness and you even smiled;
Now that our steps are warier and slow
We are your playthings, rattled and reviled.
And so, dark month, we do not call you friend
But shiver till your tribulations end.
Frank McDonald

NO. 3033: PRESIDENTIAL PATTER

Thanks go to @huntnthesnark on Twitter for this one: you are invited to take as your first line 'I am the very model of a Very Stable Genius' and continue for up to a further 15. Email entries to lucy@spectator.co.uk by midday on 24 January, please.

Crossword

2341: Durum, Durum by Doc

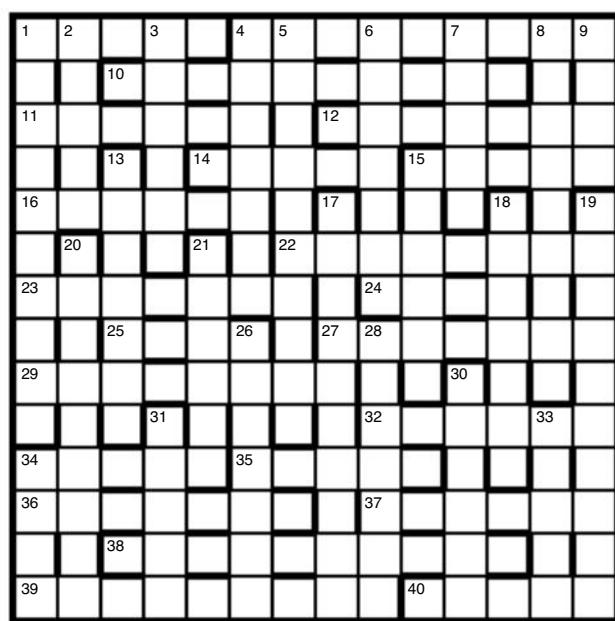
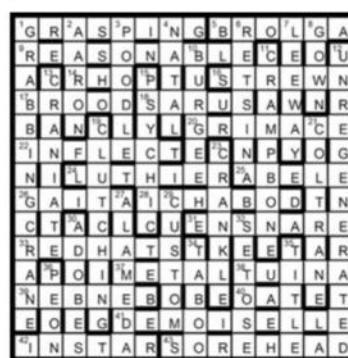
The unclued lights (one of two words) are of a kind.

Across

- Confines at convenience stores (5)
- Prison visitor, not in Rolls Royce, sadly places eggs for fertilization (9)
- Over half the train to Dover isn't broad-gauge (6)
- Range of school note (5)
- I left seafood dish for old highwayman (5)
- German philosopher and literary critic who tends the flock (6)
- Decide against having completed the crossword, we hear (8)
- Italian number silly fellows adopted (7)
- Engagements of heartless Man Utd player (4)
- Dull Eisteddfod champion returns (4)
- Dire Straits for Bolshevik opponent (7)
- One male with handy phone won't move (8)
- Forcibly remove unconventional values (6)
- Epic about parliament (Italian) (5)
- English author left in pit (5)
- Provide illumination and have a fag (7, two words)
- Gent and Monroe cavorting in the Balkans (10)

Down

- Ornamental orange tree becoming very large with time (5)
- Row of shops is away from old private apartment (6)
- Sign of progress where nursing is concerned (7)
- Setting out food on thin metal cover (7)
- Deflecting stroke made by Small and Compton (5)
- Jewish scholar stimulated without English being translated (9)
- Fielder's thin dress is an error (4)
- Family member at piano, with introductions to Mozart's Adagio (7)
- It's a party, so lay back (6)
- Kept open by the alert, brave investigator (10, two words)
- Red sign by tailless rats, say (9)
- Favourite mariner admitted to Davey Jones's locker (6)
- Chemical element upset stomach in senior clergyman pre-op (7)
- Tool for bridge, it seems (7)
- Warning call around the old city causes such an uproar (6)
- US lake regularly encountered in Strath More (5)
- Wise king hasn't got a moment for law-giver (5)
- In France, there is the heart of the sail-yard (4, three words)



A first prize of £30 for the first correct solution opened on 29 January. There are two runners-up prizes of £20. (UK solvers can choose to receive the latest edition of the *Chambers* dictionary instead of cash — ring the word 'dictionary'.) Entries to: Crossword 2341, The Spectator, 22 Old Queen Street, London SW1H 9HP. Please allow six weeks for prize delivery.

Name

Address

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Email

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SOLUTION TO 2339: INTERESTING

Deployment of a GRABBING CRANE (1D) is required to complete entries at 11, 13, 21 and 23. 1A, 19 and the puzzle's TITLE (35) are synonyms of GRABBING; 5, 18 and 41 are types of CRANE, which is also the surname of Washington Irving's character whose first name is ICHABOD (28).

First prize John Bartlett, Shirley, Solihull
Runners-up Mark Rowntree, London SE10; M. Day, London N6

No sacred cows

Screen-addicted kids?

There's an app for that

Toby Young

Over Christmas, Caroline and I finally snapped about the amount of time our children were spending on their screens. If they weren't watching Logan Paul vlogs on YouTube, they were on Snapchat or playing video games. I couldn't get them to read anything — not even one of the wonderful *How to Train Your Dragon* books — and attempts to persuade them to go on walks were met with fierce resistance. Towards the end of the holidays they began to look and act like drug addicts — pallid complexions, easily distracted, short-tempered. Perhaps they really were addicts.

Any parent who has tried to limit their child's screen time will be familiar with the standard objection: 'But Dad, you're always on your screen.' That's true, but the difference is that I'm on a Kindle reading a book. In the past, I scoffed at bibliophiles who claimed that something was lost when we switched to reading on screens, but I now realise they were right. We've lost the ability to set a good example to our children. Kids brought up in houses surrounded by books are supposed to have an advantage over those who aren't, but it's hard to see how children benefit if those books are never opened. As far as mine are concerned, Mummy and Daddy are just on screens too.



Towards the end of the holidays, my children began to look and act like drug addicts

Does spending too much time on smartphones hinder children's cognitive development? I'm usually pretty sceptical when people make those claims, but I heard it from a source I respect last year: James Flynn, the eminent political scientist who gave his name to the 'Flynn effect'. This is the well-documented phenomenon whereby average cognitive ability, as measured by intelligence tests, has been steadily increasing in the United States and other countries since 1930. Until now, that is.

I attended a conference in Montreal in July where Flynn presented his latest findings, namely, that IQ is still increasing in the developing world, but has started to decline across the West. If you ask 14-year-olds in Britain to take the same tests that 14-year-olds took in 1980, they score significantly worse. Flynn speculated that one possible explanation is the prevalence of smartphones and the amount of time British teenagers spend on social media.

This is known as the 'anti-Flynn effect' and, after seeing how brain-dead our children became during the holidays, Caroline and I decided we had to take the situation in hand. But how? In the past, our attempts to restrict screen time have always ended in failure because neither of us has had the energy to enforce the rules for more than about two weeks. But Caroline had heard about an app called OurPact that would let her choose what apps the children could launch via a control panel on her own phone. Instead of the two of us trying to take our children's devices off them during certain parts of the day — never a pleasant experience — she

could simply deactivate Snapchat, YouTube, Netflix... everything apart from the Kindle app. They'd get to keep their phones, but all they'd be able to do on them for certain periods of the day would be to read books.

The hard part, of course, is installing the app on your children's phones. As you can imagine, they're pretty reluctant to part with them, knowing what you've got in mind. You then have to persuade them to cough up their passcodes and, if we're talking about iPhones, their Apple IDs as well. I cannot tell you how much cajoling and threatening that took. Agreeing which apps they'd be allowed to use at what times of day was like negotiating the Oslo Accords. It took days.

There were also teething problems. For instance, we didn't bother to deactivate the 'News' feature on their phones — we want them to keep up with current affairs — and my 12-year-old son quickly discovered that it provided a gateway to YouTube. Luckily, he couldn't help boasting about this — 'I've hacked your stupid app' — so we were able to close that loophole.

We've now got the system up and running and it's pretty good. Not that they've started reading books on their phones, mind you. Instead, during the restricted hours they just toss them aside and start watching reruns of *Friends* on television. But that feels like a step in the right direction. Compared to Snapchat, it seems positively wholesome. Now, if we can just find an app that immobilises the telly...

Toby Young is associate editor of The Spectator.

MICHAEL HEATH



Spectator Sport

Can the long game survive?

Roger Alton

So will the sight of poor Joe Root at Sydney, pale as a ghost and barely able to stand, heroically facing 90mph bowling in a totally doomed cause, all the while racked with a tummy bug, mark the beginning of a rethink for traditional long-form cricket? Make no mistake, like millions I love the Ashes, but this was a dull series with a lot of very repetitive cricket, whether you were there — as I was for a few Tests — or one of an ever-dwindling band of late-night viewers in front of the BT coverage. And just because I can remember huddling round a small black-and-white telly as a kid to watch Kenny Barrington inch his way to 85 not out at the end of a full day's play doesn't mean such memories matter a fig to anyone in the future.

Many more tours like this, and Test cricket will be in trouble. It is already less visible, with matches involving former great nations such as Pakistan, New Zealand and West Indies largely dying or dead. The traditionalists will say that Ashes cricket will always be a major event, and India, South Africa,



Many more tours like this, and Test cricket will be in trouble

England and Australia will still play Test cricket against each other as long there is demand. (Though how much, I wonder, was the great A.B. de Villiers paid to come out of 'Test retirement' for the modestly supported current home series against India?)

No, the truth is that not enough happens for modern tastes. On a flat pitch at the WACA, 43 for two in a session is just not good enough. Neither are innings lasting 180 overs with a scoring rate of mostly less than three an over. The home crowds were restless at Perth, Melbourne and Sydney, with most of the atmosphere coming from the Barmy Army.

So will five-day Tests with tea at 20 to four become an anachronism for all but old codgers like me, sitting in a deckchair with nurse not too far away? Lurking not so far away in the wings is the power behind the game, the Indian broadcasters. India controls international cricket, but Test cricket (apart from the Ashes and games involving India) no longer fills grounds or attracts TV advertising. T20 cricket does, as does the 50-over game if it's day-night. The five-day format is simply too slow, too biased toward home teams, and there is just not enough tension per session.

I am told broadcasters say privately that they only want to screen games with full grounds, with a result, and at prime time. They argue that the long form must be rethought completely,

with Test matches of four days maximum, all day-night to ensure crowds and prime-time viewers, and ticketed cheaply to ensure big crowds. Each innings would be 120 overs with incentives for results, and the format supported by a World Cup to attract outlier nations (New Zealand and so on). Administrators must grasp the nettle of the new long form, otherwise Test cricket as played by Gavaskar, the Chappells, May and Kallis is dead.

Three things we learnt over the holiday: Anthony Joshua always makes his bed before leaving home. It makes you feel better when you get in at night, he says. What a well-brought-up young man he is. Second, the presenter Kelly Cates, besides being Kenny Dalglish's daughter, is a massive breath of fresh air in the dull old world of football punditry. She showed the boys a thing or two with a blistering attack on the pampered narcissism and lavender tuxes of the Ballon d'Or player of the year awards on *Fighting Talk*. Give that girl her own show soonest. Finally, he might be a big lad but the reaction of Rob Cross at the moment of his World Championship victory over Phil Taylor was a moment when darts led the way for graciousness and fully human interaction in sport. (Taylor's subsequent dad-dancing to Coldplay was less so, but hey, after 30 years and 16 titles he had probably earned the right.)

DEAR MARY YOUR PROBLEMS SOLVED



Q. Should the lady or the gentleman have the banquette in a restaurant? I've been brought up to believe that the lady has the banquette for her more delicate bottom — and for her handbag. She has the view of the room; the gentleman has only eyes for her. My fiancé says that a modern couple should take it in turns to have the hard chair. Whose bottom takes precedence?

— L.F., Bayswater, London

A. As with so many cultural traditions, the lady takes the

banquette for practical reasons. Not only does it allow access to her handbag and protect her more delicate clothing from spillages, but the lady usually has more data in her gossip repertoire than does the man. She tends to be more beady-eyed when it comes to social observation and more able to recognise prominent fellow diners. The man will miss out by denying her the better viewpoint since it allows her to entertain him. If, in the name of modernity, your fiancé is prepared to face the Bateman cartoon-style disapproval of waiters and other diners who will assume he just doesn't know the form, then by all means let him take it in turns with you to have the banquette.

On the subject of banquets, never overlook their facility to fast-forward latent romance should space permit a potential couple

to sit side by side. In this way you experience a 'taster' of what closer intimacy might feel like.

Q. I have been invited by some friends to a Burns Night supper in London. There will be fine company with smoked salmon, haggis, cranachan, poetry, and of course whisky. However other friends may accuse me of cultural appropriation. I am English born and bred. How should I respond? — L.K., by email

A. I turn to Burnsian Ross Leckie for the answer. Leckie, who is booked seven years in advance to speak at Burns suppers (his turn includes reciting Burns's 'Tam o' Shanter', which takes 25 minutes) says 'Burns would be appalled to think any Englishman would imagine a Scot would be offended by his going to a Burns

Night supper. The broad kirk is what the Burnsian aspires to and as for being English, "A man's a man for a' that."

Q. I often receive emails from people who are friends of friends but who I have not met, asking me to attend various Sloane Ranger-style fundraising functions set many weeks ahead. Sometimes I want to decide nearer the time yet there is often pressure to give my reply as soon as possible because of the caterers. So what I do is just send an immediate reply saying that I'm away for two weeks and will be checking emails only sporadically. I hope some of your readers might find this tip useful. — Name and address withheld

A. Thank you indeed for supplying it.

Food

Tea in the hallowed grounds

Tanya Gold



As dreams of winning the Ashes became, well, the only word is ash, for 4-0 is not a number even I would minimise, there is a place — a restaurant actually — where you can hold the Ashes in your hands. Calm down. What, as I imagine myself telling Chris Grayling all the time, would your cardiologist say? They may not be the real Ashes — the person looking after them was vague, like a parent telling a child that Father Christmas would probably come down the chimney on Christmas Eve, they couldn't really say, but it's quite likely. This restaurant is the Long Room at Lord's Cricket Ground, the home of Marylebone Cricket Club. I don't have a sport — just arguing — but if I make mistakes, please write in like angry birds. It will cheer you up. Throw a ball at me, made of words.

I always saw Lord's, which was opposite my synagogue — the Liberal Jewish Synagogue, which has two lady rabbis and is, to the orthodox, about as Jewish as a pet shop — as a friendly alien space, with an alien ship (the press

I didn't know you could eat at Lord's without queuing for 200 years

centre, which looks like a squashed golf ball in the sky) atop its mystery. It seemed to be everything this outsider loved about England: England the stage set, and self-gilding fantasy; it sure beats a pogrom on Twitter, or back in the old country. I passed Lord's every day when I lived in London, and marvelled that something so English could exist in St John's Wood without an army to defend it, but then I realised it does have an army. My husband's uncle comes from Devon to London to serve, after queuing for 200 years.

I have never been inside before; I am a hack, and hacks don't queue for 200 years for anything. We did hold the party for our son's naming ceremony inside the Lord's Tavern next door though. It seemed to express his heritage (Devizes/Lodz) better than anything Stefan Zweig, or I, could write.

I didn't know you could eat at Lord's without queuing for 200 years, and I have nothing like that kind of time to spare. But then my husband's sister sent us tickets for tea in Novem-



'I'm already feeling miles smugger.'

ber, when there would be no cricket on, and so there would be space for us.

And so we stood, my husband and I, outside the W.G. Grace gates with other married couples, all dressed up for the occasion in suits and tea dresses and hats like country cousins on a road trip to the House of Fraser sale. The women wore tolerant expressions; the men looked like infants do when they are happy.

And what is inside? A cricket pitch, of course, as fine as an Oxford college lawn; and a museum featuring knee-pads and photographs of handsome West Indians throwing balls at other people; and a tea-room — the Long Room. It is pale blue, with shining chandeliers and gaping ceilings and some very good art (for England), all of dead men and boys playing cricket in a long, speechless conversation. It is not my dream, but I admire it anyway.

We have a view of the empty ground. I prefer ghostly places; places that bear witness; places that just are. The food, served by waiters who act like nannies — they are soothing, as if we are babies in a ball pit — is a perfect English tea: scones, jam, cream, delicate, fleeting sandwiches. My husband looks as happy as I have ever seen him, and when a woman brings a tiny urn — accompanied by a photographer! — he mutters 'The Ashes!' and poses for a photograph holding them, with glazed eyes. Not a restaurant then, but something better, something more — a drug.

Lord's, St John's Wood Road, London NW8 8QN, tel: 020 7616 8500.

MIND YOUR LANGUAGE

Bad academic style

Why do so many academics write so badly? Those who make the study of language their life's work are as bad as any. I saw two books about English in the 18th century reviewed in the *TLS* and thought I might buy them, until I read quotations from them that the reviewer had chosen, not by way of mockery, but to explain their arguments.

In *Multilingual Subjects*, Daniel De Wispelare argues that 'anglophone translation theorists gravitated towards one specific set of metaphors in order to advocate for protocols of linguistic inclusion and exclusion that would improve anglophone literary aesthetics within the space



of global linguistic multiplicity'. I would guess that he means by this something like: 'In discussing how to choose the right words to make English translation more beautiful in a world of many tongues, critics tended to use one set of metaphors.'

He doesn't mean 'in order to advocate for' but 'in advocating'. I happen to hate the neologism *advocate for*. That may be just me, but it is a choice of words (or, if you prefer an outcome of protocols of linguistic inclusion

and exclusion) that bodes ill, like mouse droppings in a hotel bedroom. Even the patient reviewer finds him 'occasionally falling prey to too much jargon'.

It is possible by 'within the space of global linguistic multiplicity' he is referring to different forms of English spoken round the world. Who can say? But I am not prepared to translate his whole book into English first so that I can read it.

Janet Sorensen in *Strange Vernaculars*, says representations of provincial speech 'with their humorous innovations on genres of antiquarian writing, their mixed lexicons, and linguistic innovations, remind us ... that Britain's

provinces were not enclaves untouched by the period's transformations; they were not, as anachronizing narratives would have it, the products of the "waiting-room of history". Perish the thought. But what's with the scattering of innovations? And how can you innovate on genres?

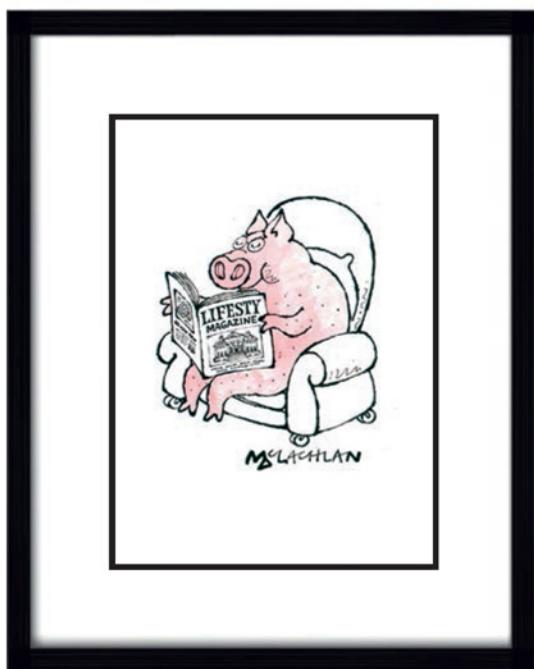
For all I know, these are brilliant and painstaking scholars, but the university presses of Pennsylvania and Princeton, which published the two books, would find their reputation shine more brightly if they improved their own 'anglophone literary aesthetics within the space of global linguistic multiplicity'.

— Dot Wordsworth

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